

Start Here

a journey through
Charlotte Mason's
20 principles

by Brandy Vencel

Start Here:

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Please note: these pages are extracted from the original and complete study of Start Here: A Journey Through Charlotte Mason's 20 Principles available at [Afterthoughts Blog](#).

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Sample

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Chapter 1:

How to Use this Book in Groups

This study was written with groups in mind. CM study groups are a real blessing, and if you have one, you know what I mean. Out of these groups are often born field trips, co-ops, nature study groups, and more. All of these things are more easily done when the moms involved share a core philosophy and are trying to embody the same ideals.

A CM group can be as small as two people or as large as fifty (anything over fifty, in my opinion, would be better split into smaller groups). The only requirement is that more than one person is involved. Over the years, my groups have met in coffee shops, restaurants, and host homes. A variety of locations can work, so don't get too caught up in venue.

How My Group Works

My local group, the one that first did Start Here (back when I simply called it "The 20 Principles Study"), currently uses this schedule for our monthly meetings:

7:00 p.m.	arrive, chat, coffee, tea, and snacks
7:15	introduce ourselves and pray
7:45	commence discussion
9:00	open up to questions about any CM topic
9:15	wrap up formal part of the meeting
11:00	last stragglers go home

As you can see, we've made ample time for conversation after the study. Our goal was to build a community, not just read and study together. All those hours of drinking coffee and eating strawberries have added up to wonderful friendships.

We don't introduce ourselves every single time, but whenever there are a lot of new people, we make time for quick introductions. Off and on, we have even used nametags. This is to help the new arrivals feel more comfortable.

Using this Study

Let's say you are the leader of a group. The first thing you need to do is **make sure each group member has a copy of this study**. I offer a bulk buy discount (for groups buying ten or more copies), so contact me before you purchase. You can have each member purchase a copy on my website using the code I will send you. Each purchase is for a single copy of the study for one person only. (Please do not email copies of this study to others. I thank you for respecting my copyright.)

You also need to acquire copies of [For the Children's Sake](#) by Susan Schaeffer Macauley. This is the one book that is not public domain in my reading assignments, and it's an essential read.

After that, you can:

- **Set a date.** Send out an invitation (I use email) early enough that your members have time to do all the reading. At least two weeks advance notice would be optimal, especially for moms that need to arrange childcare.
- **Clarify which principle(s) assignments you are on.** Include this information in your email so that you are all (literally) on the same page. Each page of reading assignments is meant for a single meeting.¹ I've divided the reading assignments into required reading and optional reading. The reason for this is that some moms are *not* going to have time to complete a really long list of readings before a group meeting. The required reading includes only the most important one or two selections from the list. On the other hand, some moms are going to really resonate with the reading and be hungry for much more. The optional reading list is bigger – sometimes it is quite lengthy – that offers food to the hungry reader.

¹ This is a **long** study. My group meets monthly, skipping September and December. It took us over two years to finish this study. I know that some groups choose to rush through a book and talk about the whole thing in a single meeting. There is a place for that, of course, but CM's principles are very big, and I do not believe more than one or two principles can be sufficiently discussed in one sitting. If you meet monthly, this study would take 15 months.

Chapter 2:

How to Use this Book as an Individual

Let's say you live in the jungle. Or maybe you are agoraphobic. Or perhaps you don't have childcare that would allow you to go to a meeting. Let's say your husband said you can't add anything else until you quit something you're already involved in because you have trouble saying no. Or maybe there aren't any local groups and you don't know anyone else who wants to study CM.

It is good to build a principle-based community. Homeschooling can be isolating and isolation is Not Good. But, with that said, I know there are reasons, both real and imagined, that you may not be in a CM group. Good news! You can still use this study.

Although this study guide was written with groups in mind, it was also designed to assist individual group members. You may or may not belong to a group, but no matter. This study is for everyone because each member of a group is an individual.

Here are some suggestions for this endeavor:

1. **Get a notebook.** You can record your questions, thoughts, and favorite quotes from the readings. You can use your notes to engage in a "discussion" with yourself in which you mull over how to apply the principles to your daily life.
2. **Do all the readings.** The nice thing about doing something individually is that you can do it at your own pace. While you might not be able to get all the readings done in time for a meeting (which is why I have required and optional readings), working independently means *there are no deadlines*. The optional readings are full of gems, and I highly encourage you to explore them all before moving on.
3. **Read through the [20 Principles posts at the AO Forum](#).** I updated and changed a lot when I brought this study into ebook form, it's true. But if

Chapter 5: Reading Assignments

Sample

Principle 1: Children are born persons.

Required Reading:

- *For the Children's Sake* by Susan Schaeffer Macauley, Chapter 2
- [Towards a Philosophy of Education \(Vol. 6\), Chapter 2](#)

Optional Reading:

Charlotte Mason's Volumes:

- [Parents and Children \(Vol. 2\), p. 232 "We do not recognize 'Child-Nature.'"](#)
- [School Education \(Vol. 3\), Chapter 4](#)
- [School Education \(Vol. 3\), p. 46-47 "Sacredness of the Person"](#)
- [School Education \(Vol. 3\), pp. 63-65 "We take Children as Persons" – "And Adequate Doctrine"](#)
- [School Education \(Vol. 3\), pp. 68-69 "A Human Being"](#)

Study Tip: Don't be intimidated by the many links from Miss Mason's volumes. Many of the selections are only a paragraph or two.

Parents' Review Articles:

- [The Imagination in Childhood](#)

Blog Posts:

- [Children are Born Persons, Revisited](#) by Leslie Noelani Laurio
- [We Undervalue Children](#) by Naomi Goegan
- [Classically Charlotte: Children are born persons](#) by Mystie Winckler
- [Children are Born Persons](#) by Brandy Vencel
- [The Mystery of Persons](#)

Sample Questions:

- How did you define a child before you read these assignments?
- Have you ever experienced one of your children being treated as less than a person? Explain.
- What is one thing that you can change tomorrow that will cause you to treat your child more like a person?
- Articulate the difference between a child being born a person and a child being born a blank slate.

Who shall measure the range of a child's thoughts?

His continual questions about God, his speculations about 'Jesus,' are they no more than idle curiosity, or are they symptoms of a God-hunger with which we are all born, and is a child able to comprehend as much of the infinite and the unseen as are his self-complacent elders? Is he 'cabined, cribbed, confined,' in our ways and does the fairy tale afford a joyful escape to regions where all things are possible? We are told that children have no imagination, that they must needs see and touch, taste and handle, in order to know. While a child's age is still counted by months, he devotes himself to learning the properties of things by touching, pulling, tearing, throwing, tasting, but as months pass into years a *coup d'oeil* suffices for all but new things of complicated structure. Life is a continual progress to a child. **He does not go over old things in old ways; his joy is to go on.**

Charlotte Mason

(Towards a Philosophy of Education, p. 36)

Principle 2*: [Children] are not born either good or bad, but with possibilities for good and for evil.

Required Reading:

- *For the Children's Sake* Chapter 3, "Children: Good and Bad" subsection (pp. 42-47)
- [Towards a Philosophy of Education \(Vol. 6\), Chapter 3](#)

Optional Reading:

Charlotte Mason's Volumes:

- [Home Education \(Vol. 1\), pp. 108-109 "We Think, as we are accustomed to Think"](#)
- [Parents and Children \(Vol. 2\), Chapter 3](#)
- [Parents and Children \(Vol. 2\), pp. 69-71 "How far does Heredity Count?" – "For their Education, Children want chiefly Opportunity"](#)
- [Parents and Children \(Vol. 2\), Chapter 15](#)
- [School Education \(Vol. 3\), pp. 129-130 "Morals do not come by Nature" – "Children are born neither Moral nor Immoral"](#)

Study Tip: If you can only read **one** Optional Reading selection, make sure it is Karen Glass' article "Why Did She Have to Say That?" It is *the* definitive article on this subject.

Parents' Review Articles:

- [Teaching in the Branches \(Moral and Religious\)](#) by Charlotte Mason
- [Heredity: Its Influence on the Physical and Moral Training of Children](#) by A.H. Tubby
- [Parental Peculiarities and Parental Possibilities](#) by Dr. H. Laing Gordon
- [Morals in the Home](#) by W.J. Greenstreet

* In this principle, CM is combating the doctrine of her time belonging to Eugenicists who claimed that children had predetermined hereditary natures which could not be changed, not even by divine intervention. The readings from Vol. 2 dig more deeply into this concept.

Blog Posts:

- [Why Did She Have to Say That?](#) by Karen Glass
- [Charlotte Mason, Total Depravity, and the Divine Image](#) by Brandy Vencel
- [Charlotte Mason's Parentage](#) from The Common Room
- [Classically Charlotte: The nature of children](#) by Mystie Winckler

Sample Questions:

- Name a characteristic your child has that could be used for good or for evil.
- Is redemption possible? Or are we doomed by our parents – by where we come from – to be what we are?
- Can you think of some practices in parenting or in teaching that you might need to change in light of this principle?

The man converted, the work is not done.

These sinners exceedingly are not only sinful, but diseased; morbid conditions of brain have been set up, and every one of them needs individual treatment, like any other sick man, for disease slow of cure. For a month, three months, six months, it will not do to let one of them alone.

Curative *treatment* is an absolute condition of success, and here is where human co-operation is invited in what is primarily and **ultimately the work of God**. There are places in the brain where ill thoughts have of old run their course; and these sore places must have time, blessed time, wherein to heal. That is to say, **all traffic in the old thoughts must be absolutely stopped at whatever cost.**

Charlotte Mason

(Parents and Children, pp. 164-165)

Afterword

Take a deep breath and pat yourself on the back because you've just journeyed through all of Charlotte Mason's 20 principles. That is a great thing! These principles were, to her, the most important aspects of her philosophy.

The question now is **where do we go from here?**

First, I encourage you to never stop learning and growing in your understanding of education. As long as you are alive, education will be a part of your life, and it is a worthwhile endeavor to come to know and embrace educational ideals.

With that said, I think there are a [number of options for continuing study](#).

[Purchase](#) the study guide to read more.

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