

Train Up a Child: It Takes Much, *Much* Hard Work!

As another school year draws to a close, it is my hope that you will pause to reflect on the crucial investment you have made in your children. Your choice of Christian schooling is one that warrants commendation and encouragement. Scripture commends your decision: “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it” (Proverbs 22:6, NIV). No one doubts the significant role of education in the training of children, and an education imbued with biblical principles and inspired by teachers who not only are professionally prepared but are also followers of Christ adds a dimension and depth that will produce fruit.

I continue to stress the importance of being alert to the unbelievable and vast competition for the hearts and minds of our children. The range of competition—from entertainment media to a culture immersed in serving self—continues to offer highly tantalizing portions of low-level values packaged deceptively and seductively. As parents you have much, *much* hard work to do.

The notion of training up children in the way they should go is a directive that at times can seem absolutely overwhelming—after all, when is someone “trained up”? Best-selling author Malcolm Gladwell, in his most recent book, *Outliers: The Story of Success*, recounts the results of a study done in the early 1990s at Berlin’s elite Academy of Music. Psychologist K. Anders Ericsson and two of Ericsson’s colleagues questioned the school’s violinists in an attempt to discover what sets apart those who have potential to become world-class soloists from those who may be considered merely “good” and those who are unlikely to ever play professionally (2008, 38–39).

What Ericsson and his colleagues discovered was—and perhaps we are not surprised—that by age 20, those in the elite group were training intently, investing significantly more than 30 hours a week. The violinists in that group had each accumulated 10,000 hours of practice. Those categorized as merely “good” had each accumulated 8,000 hours, and those in the group exhibiting the least proficiency had each accumulated only slightly over 4,000 hours of practice (Gladwell 2008, 38–39).

Gladwell writes the following:

The striking thing about Ericsson’s study is that he and his colleagues couldn’t find any “naturals,” musicians who floated effortlessly to the top while practicing a fraction of the time their peers did. Nor could they find any “grinds,” people who worked harder than everyone else, yet just didn’t

have what it takes to break the top ranks. Their research suggests that once a musician has enough ability to get into a top music school, the thing that distinguishes one performer from another is how hard he or she works. That’s it. And what’s more, the people at the very top don’t work just harder or even much harder than everyone else. They work much, *much* harder. (2008, 39; italics in original)

In concluding comments regarding the study, Gladwell adds, “In fact, researchers have settled on what they believe is the magic number for true expertise: ten thousand hours” (2008, 40).

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Please understand clearly: I am not putting a determinate number of hours on what it takes to train up children or to become parents who possess true expertise. I do believe, though, that the illustration gives credibility to the analogy that just as honing a gift in the arts requires intense practice and training, so does the great work, or art, of training up our children. And to capitalize on the crucial hours spent in formal education that is from a faith-based, Christ-centered perspective brings the richest and highest level in the godly work of *training* we have been called to as parents.

May you be richly blessed in your commitment to Christian schooling.

Reference

Gladwell, Malcolm. 2008. *Outliers: The story of success*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.



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