

## How To Make A Concert Violinist

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by Mitchell Stevens

To my amazement, my 4-year-old niece, Haydon, has recently taken up violin lessons. She's always been a very musical child, and my sister, who specializes in developing musical skills in children from infancy, has encouraged that. But I still had a hard time picturing someone barely four years old learning to play a violin. I asked Haydon's father what exactly was involved in concert violin lessons for someone who is just learning ABC's and 1-2-3's. I mean, do they even make violins in that size? He told me that everything they are doing now has to do with setting routine and establishing basics to build on.

One important part of getting her started this early is to establish practice and training as routine. Rather than waiting until she's eight years old and it's a struggle to try to get her used to going to classes and practicing, they're starting her early, so that by the time she's eight, training is just . . . what you do. It won't require any special effort, there will be no struggle of getting into a new habit. It will have been established as a part of the child's life.

Haydon's classes began with a simple lesson in respect: The student bows to the teacher and asks to be taught. The teacher then bows back to the student and asks that the student allow him to teach. The idea seems simple enough, but with a 4-year-old who is not particularly quick with the "pleases" and "thank-yous," this took some time.

Her instrument for the time being is a violin-shaped piece of sturdy Styrofoam, with a small wooden dowel rod shaped like a bow. Her lessons consist of learning how to stand properly, which hand holds the bow, which hand holds the violin, how to cup her chin in the rest, etc. She's not making music, like I had originally pictured. She's learning bare basics. I had taken these things for granted, but without having them well-established as second nature, she would have a much more difficult time with the more complex things to come. How to stand, how to hold the violin, and how to make the basic movements make up a vital foundation from which more complex things can be accurately accomplished. You make the child a fine-tuned instrument, before an actual instrument is even introduced.

These are the same principles that all Christian parents must use in order to make their children fine-tuned instruments for God. Christians are God's instruments for praise and good works (Eph. 2:10). The earlier the training begins for that calling, the better.

For Christian parents, that means establishing the work and worship of God as routine. If parents establish a pattern in which it is often acceptable to miss the assemblies for something else, that is the pattern the child will learn to follow. They will learn to make and find excuses, no matter how trivial, to avoid worship and Bible study. On the other hand, if a child is brought up from infancy with the understanding that there are certain times that are devoted to God, they will learn that it is . . . well, just what you do. And, like those violin lessons, the classes alone are of little benefit if the student is not reinforced with practice at home. The Lord must be a presence in the home, His word attending "*when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up*" (Deut. 6:6-7). It is established as part of the child's life. "*Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it*" (Prov. 22:6).

The first lesson while establishing worship as a routine is a simple one in respect. Children must be taught to bow before God, approaching him with a spirit of submission (James 4:7), for in this spirit God will receive them in mercy (Matt. 5:3) and they will allow His Spirit to instruct them through the Scriptures. ". . . *In humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls*" (James 1:21). The idea, again, is simple enough, but it means confronting the willfulness of a child head-on, and may be the lesson that is hardest learned. It begins by mechanical routine: worship is a time of silence and stillness, not foolishness or getting up and down (Prov. 22:15, Psalm 46:10).

A child must be instructed in the bare basics, the ABC's and 1-2-3's of the Bible. The little things we may take for granted must be established as second nature: Who made you? Who loves you? Why do we want to behave? How do you stand and sit in the worship assembly? Otherwise, children will have a much harder time with the more complex things to come. When a knowledge of sin and the lure of temptation becomes a part of a young person's life, the world can . . .

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