

THE '10,000-HOUR RULE'**By Jim Mathis**

I recently served as an usher at the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts in Kansas City, Missouri, U.S.A. The special guest soloist was Joshua Bell, one of the best – If not the best – violinists in the world. Many people have observed that seeing him in concert is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. They said that the last time I saw him, too, so for me it apparently has been a twice-in-a-lifetime experience.

This is like the “100-year floods” that seem to occur every few years. But this is not to diminish Joshua’s skills and musical gifts. In fact, the weather analogy is not far-fetched at all because his virtuosity impacts the audience like a flood to the senses.

Listening to Joshua perform reminded me of the so-called “10,000-hour rule.” This idea suggests it takes about 10,000 hours of practice or experience to become an expert or master at your chosen craft. Of course, the quality of practice and extent of your innate giftedness or talent also factor into the degree of mastery you can attain.

But the number seems about right. Most doctors spend at least 10,000 hours in medical school, and master plumbers and mechanics probably have acquired about 10,000 hours experience during their careers. Students graduating with an MBA may be highly educated, but it still takes many, many hours of work and experience for them to truly excel in their business and professional careers.

What does the 10,000-hour rule look like? Working for 40 hours a week for five years calculates to approximately 10,000 hours. If a person practiced playing the guitar an hour a day, it would take more than 27 years to get to 10,000 hours.

My experience with people in various professions seems to confirm this theory. The most accomplished among them have put in more hours than that at their craft. Talent or giftedness can be greatly overrated; if you do not try to develop it, you will not excel. However, the importance of time devoted to learning and perfecting skills is often underrated, since hard work and determination can take you a long way.

I have heard a singer or musician needs to perform a song 100 times before they *really* know it. In my profession, photography, I have made more than one million photographs and spent around 70,000 hours doing some sort of photography. I trust that has translated into an acceptable level of expertise. It is possible to produce millions of low-quality photographs, of course, or to sing a song improperly 100 times. But generally speaking, there is no substitute for experience and practice. The book of Proverbs in the Bible’s Old Testament has much to say about this. Here is a sampling:

Committing to the long haul. We live in a time when immediate results are expected, even demanded. But some things have no shortcuts, including professional growth. *“He who works his land will have abundant food, but he who chases fantasies lacks judgment”* (Proverbs 12:11).

Valuing the work you do. If you want to be known for the quality of your work, you should be willing to do it in quantity, giving it much of your time. "One who is slack in his work is brother to one who destroys" (Proverbs 18:9). "All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty" (Proverbs 14:23).

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. What are your thoughts about the "10,000-hour rule"? Do you think it is a valid principle for professional achievement?
2. Is there anything you have done in your life for which you have invested 10,000 hours or more? If so, how would you rate your level of accomplishment or expertise in that area?
3. Since we live in an instant, microwave-type of society, how can we overcome the temptation to take shortcuts and instead, be willing to devote the time necessary to accomplish important goals and objectives?
4. The proverbs cited talk about "chasing fantasies" and "mere talk." Have you observed or experienced this in your business or professional career? How can they be detrimental to long-term success?

If you would like to look at or discuss other portions of the Bible that relate to this topic, consider the following brief sampling of passages:

Proverbs 10:4, 15:19, 20:4, 22:29; Matthew 5:13-16; Colossians 3:17,23; James 2:14-17