



# **Battling Discouragement**

By Jason Wilford

In my experience as a guitar teacher, I've seen countless people become frustrated with certain aspects of playing and practicing the guitar. From time to time, I've seen students that simply want to give up playing the guitar because they aren't progressing as fast as they would like to; others feel that they will never get to the level of playing that they want to see themselves at. Whatever the case may be, I've noticed that the feeling of discouragement often stems from not truly understanding the process of learning guitar. I often hear the question from students and parents, such as: "How long until I can play guitar like (insert guitarists name here)?", or "Will my son/daughter be good enough in six months to play in a band?" In my mind, these are nothing more than rhetorical questions. The answers depends on so many factors, including willingness, desire, physical ability, and much more.

Learning anything in life takes time, and as the saying goes, "Rome wasn't built in a day". Many people feel discouraged if they can't play something right away. Most guitarists have it in their mind that they should be able to play a song or piece of music perfectly within a week, or even a month. What most fail to realize is that most of these things can take many months, if not years, to perfect! I know this firsthand, and most of the things I can play very well at this point in time, I started learning many years ago.

To give you an example, I have been working on 'sweep picking' for the past two months (If you don't know what that is, don't worry – that's not what's important here.) I'm not anywhere near being able to perform this material at high speed, and my confidence with this technique is weak to say the least. Despite how slowly I feel I'm progressing, the most important thing is that I commit to consistently practice it. The only way to get better at something is to stick with it, regardless of how well you perceive yourself doing. After all, if you stop practicing altogether, there is no chance you will be able to truly master a certain technique or approach. It takes time to build muscle memory, and sometimes even if we 'know' how to do something, it takes quite a long time to actually 'do' it.

Instead of thinking about your playing in a negative way, you should focus on is where you would like to see yourself in the future as a guitar player, and the steps you need to take to get to there. An experienced guitar teacher is really important in this sense, as they can break down all the steps for you and find ways for you to reach your goals. They can even help you define your goals if you don't know where to start. It's important to understand that everyone's journey in music is different, and that the learning curve varies from person to person. Even small feats deserve encouragement in this respect, and time should not be relevant when it comes to progress. The most important things you can bring to your guitar playing are passion, dedication, and desire. Learning something quickly doesn't prove that you have any of those qualities, but working on something for months definitely does.

Learning to play the guitar is a long process, and the best thing you can do is commit to it with all you have. Find ways to make it fun for yourself, and try to focus on what you're getting better at. A good way to take note of this is to periodically record yourself. It doesn't have to be a high quality recording; you can even use your computer microphone or webcam for this. If you listen back to recordings from six months or a year ago, your improvements become quite clear (you do have to practice for this to work!) You will find that there's nothing more encouraging than actually noticing the progress you have made, whether it be a small step, or a giant leap. Remember that if you keep at it, and keep focused, you can achieve whatever you put your mind to. How long it takes to master something isn't that important – eventually being able to master it is!