



ONLINE  
CHRISTADELPHIAN  
BIBLE SCHOOL

# THE STOICS: WHO THEY WERE AND WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THEM

David P. Levin

July, 2021

Online Christadelphian Bible School

## FOUR POINTS OF CONTACT BETWEEN STOICS AND SCRIPTURE

- Stoics are mentioned by name, Acts 17:18
- Paul quotes a Stoic philosopher, Acts 17:28
- The brother of one of the most well-known of all Stoic philosophers makes a cameo appearance in Acts 18:12-17.
- Stoicism has many parallels to Biblical thought on ethics, mental process, and personal growth.

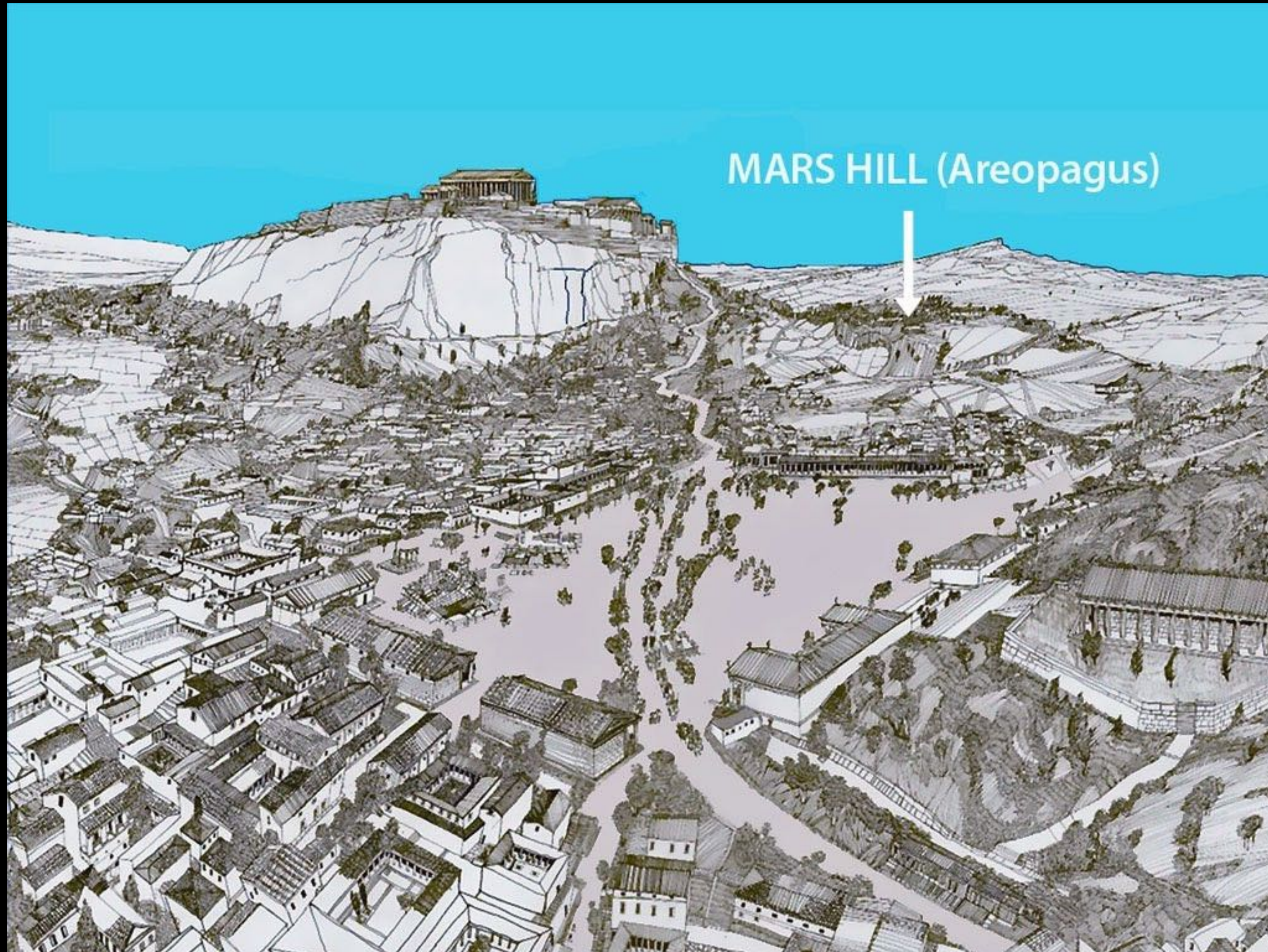
# ACTS 17:16-19

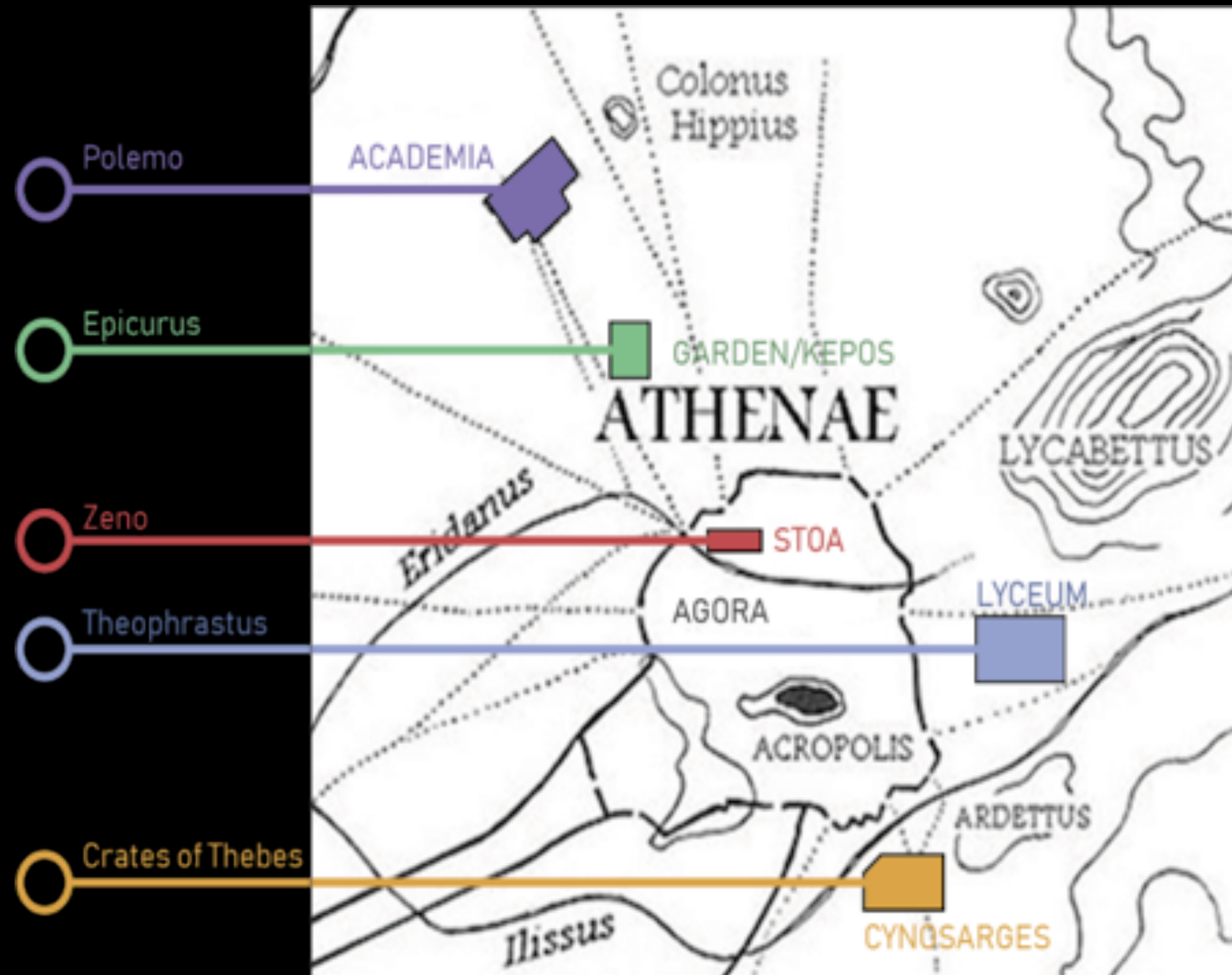
- Now while Paul was waiting for them in **Athens**, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw the **city** was filled with idols. So he reasoned in the **synagogue** with the **Jews** and the **devout persons**, and in the **marketplace** every day with those who happened to be there. Some of the **Epicurean** and **Stoic philosophers** also conversed with him. . . . and they took him and brought him to the **Areopagus**



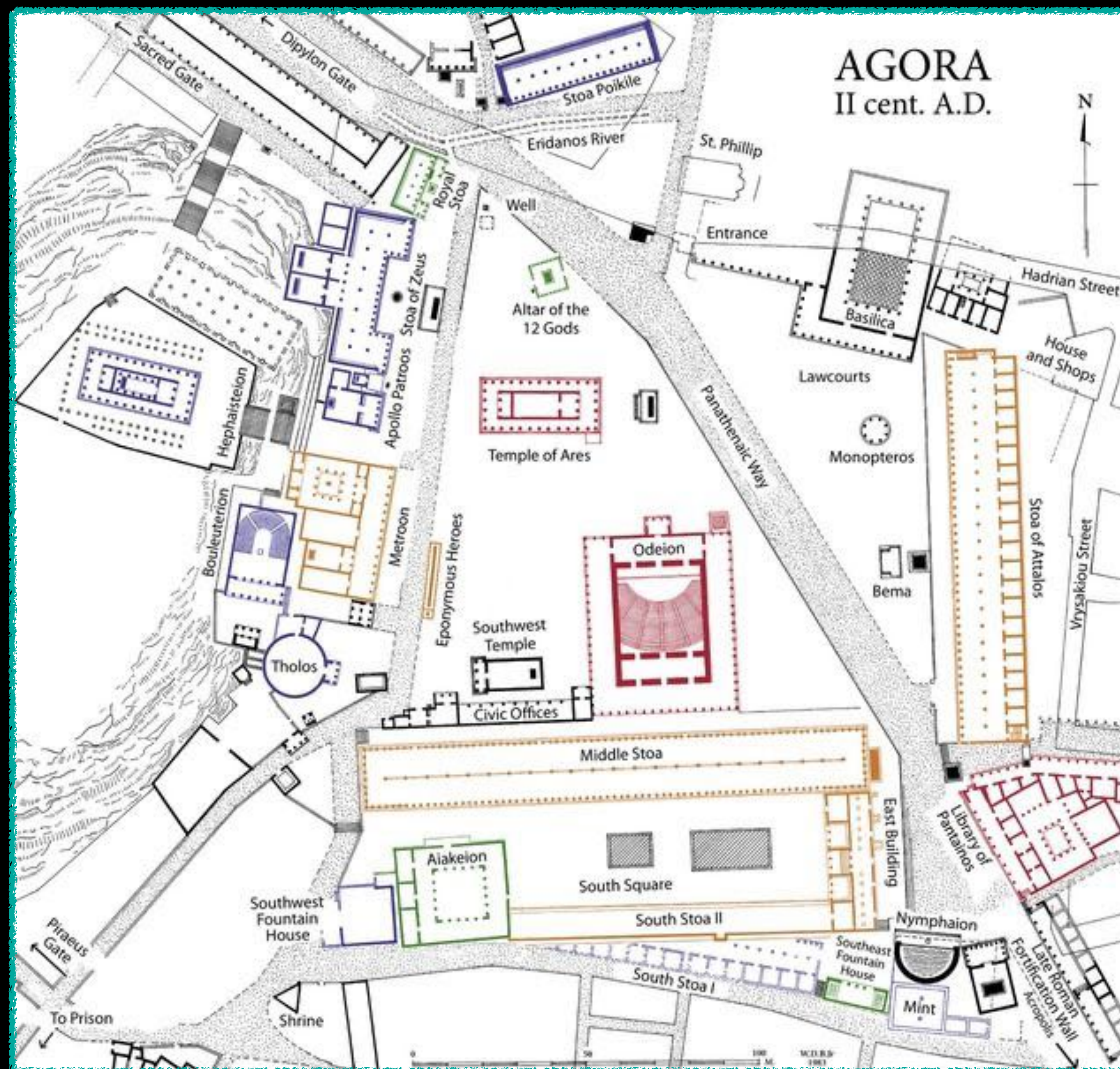


# PAUL SPEAKS "FROM THE MIDST" OF MARS HILL



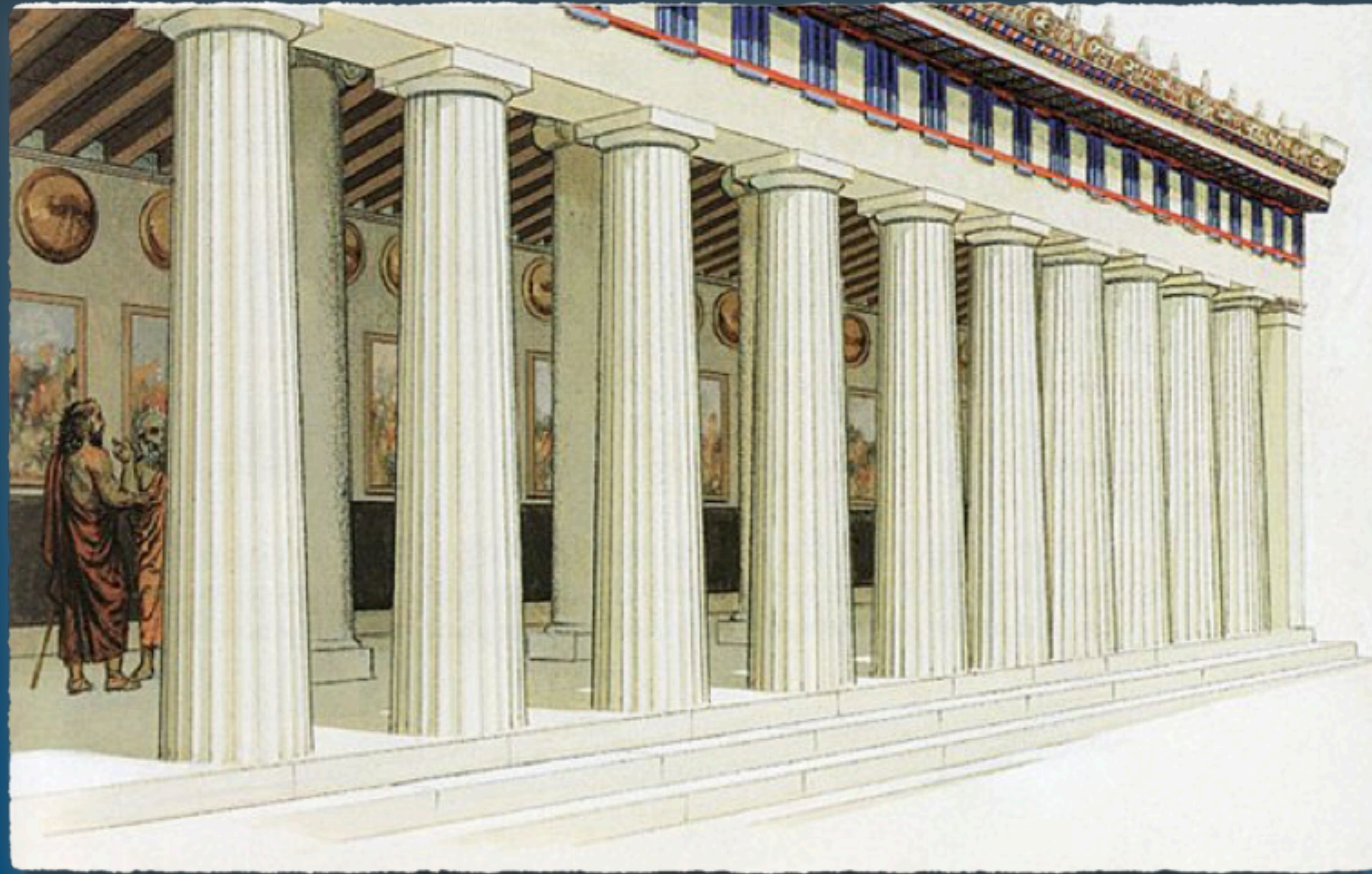


# Layout of the Agora and Vicinity





# STOΑ POIKILE (THE PAINTED STOA)



# THE STOA OF ATTALOS



# THE STOA OF ATTALOS



# SOME BASICS OF STOIC PHILOSOPHY

- The world is always changing, usually unpredictable, and often painful.
- You can't control the world outside of you.
- Your only domain of control is your own will, thoughts, and behavior.
- Accepting your lot in life and whatever happens to you is described as "living according to nature."
- Using your controlled mind to develop virtue is the highest goal of existence and the means of true happiness.
- Virtue: moral wisdom, courage, honesty/integrity/justice, and self-control/moderation.
- Virtue is also manifested by living a productive civic and social life, being a good person to others.
- The only things that can properly be called "good" or "bad" are our own thoughts and actions.
- Character development is a daily, focused, lifetime project.

## THE FOUR VIRTUES OF STOICISM

- Love truth and wisdom.
- Treat others with kindness, fairness, and justice.
- Be brave and courageous.
- Master your desires; live with self-control and moderation.

# THE FOUR VIRTUES OF STOICISM

... Wisdom (*sophia*), Righteousness (*dikaiosune*), Fortitude (*andreia*), and Temperance (*sophrosune*), or Wisdom, Justice, Courage, and Moderation in more modern language. These virtues came to be represented by four corresponding animals in the traditional symbol known as the tetramorph: the *man* of wisdom, *eagle* of justice, *lion* of fortitude, and *ox* or *bull* of temperance.

## MUSONIUS RUFUS ON THE USE OF KNOWLEDGE

Just as there is no use in medical study unless it leads to the health of the human body, so there is no use to a philosophical doctrine unless it leads to the virtue of the human soul.

## THREE BEST KNOWN STOIC PHILOSOPHERS

- Lucius Anneas Seneca, c.4 B.C.-65 A.D. brother of Gallio (Acts 18:12)
- Epictetus, c.55 A.D.-135 A.D.
- Marcus Aurelius, 121 A.D.-180 A.D. emperor 161-180



# THE CORE OF STOICISM: LOCUS OF CONTROL



Happiness and freedom begin with a clear understanding of one principle. Some things are within your control. And some things are not.

—Epictetus

# What is NOT in your control?

- the weather
- the stock market, the price of eggs, etc.
- what other people think and do, e.g., what I say in this class
- God's will
- pandemics, volcanic eruptions, sea currents, etc.
- the past

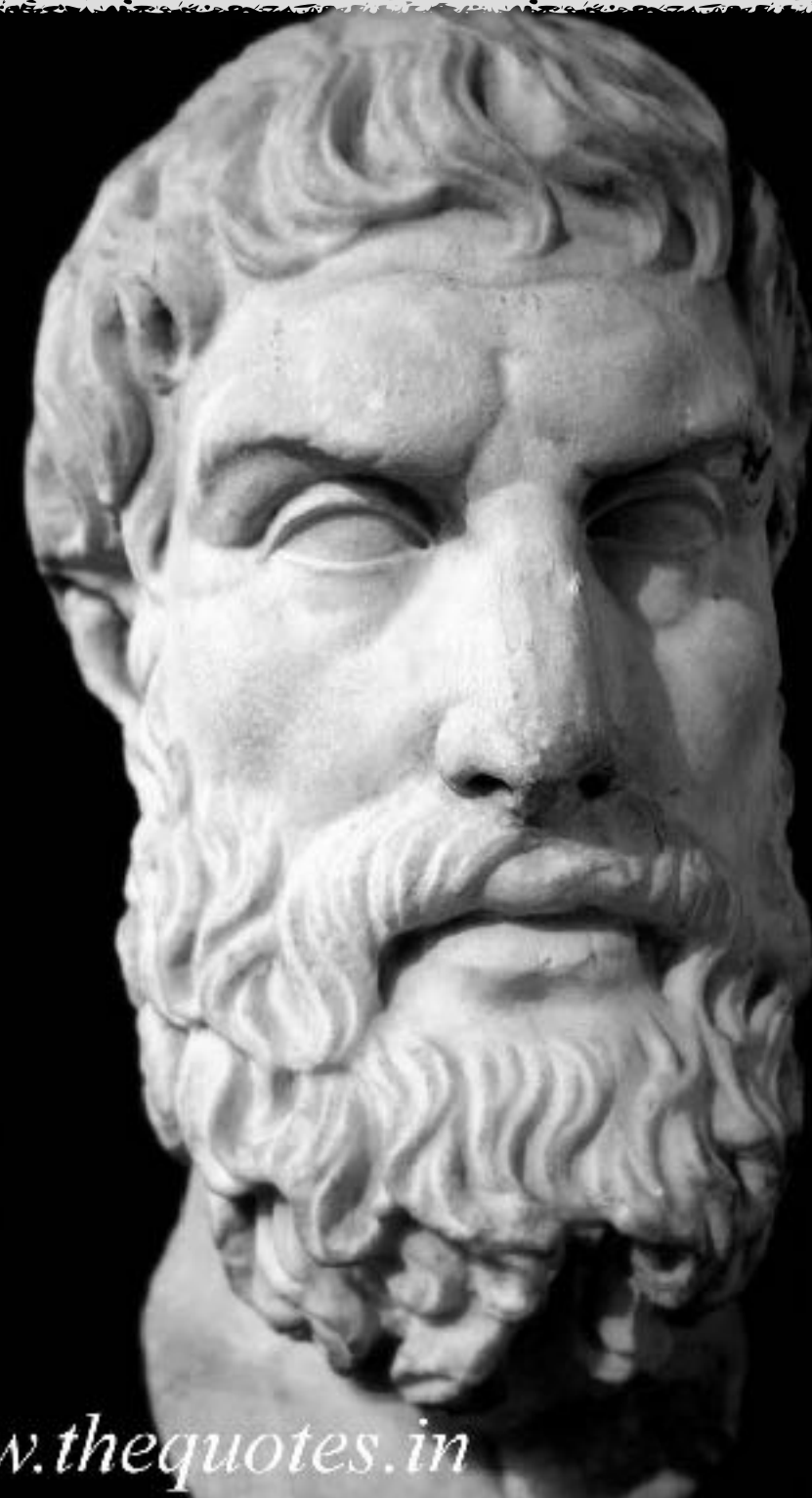
# What IS in *your* control?

- What *you* do
- What *you* think
- Where *you* go
- How *you* accept God's will
- With whom *you* associate
- Your personal free will/choice

# What PART of a situation can you control?

- You can't control the weather . . . but you can dress appropriately.
- You can't control the stock market . . . but you can make prudent investments and utilize your financial resources wisely.
- You can't control the past . . . but you can control how you think about the past.
- You can't control the pandemic . . . but you can take appropriate health measures.
- You can't control how others treat you . . . but you can control how you treat them.
- What about your salvation?

# THE CORE OF STOICISM: LOCUS OF CONTROL



It's not what happens to you,  
but how you react to it that  
matters.

Epictetus

[www.thequotes.in](http://www.thequotes.in)

## SAID ANOTHER WAY

People are not  
disturbed by things,  
but by the views they  
take of them.

Epictetus

# WHAT SCRIPTURE SAYS THIS?

Mark 7:22-23

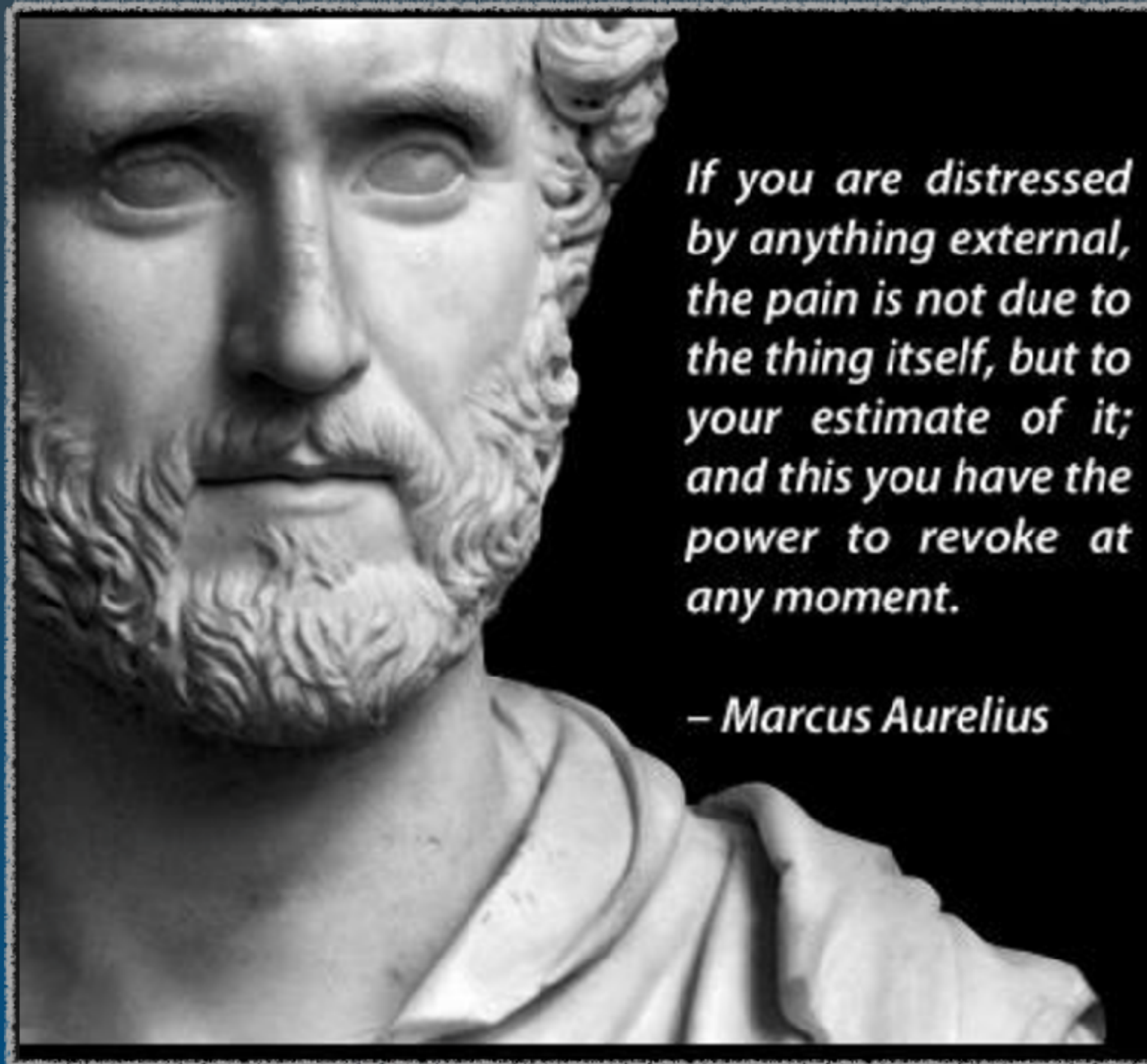
It is not what is outside of person that goes into a person and defiles him, but what comes out of the heart (mind).

The Stoics' morality was based mostly on maintaining emotional self-control, and letting nothing dissuade or interfere with doing your daily duty. They had relatively little interest in matters that the Bible emphasises, such as love, joy, sexual morality, humility, generosity, restraining the lusts of the flesh. Not these weren't important to them, and not that they were immoral people. It is that Stoic morality had no personal God, no savior, no theological basis of flawed human nature.

Nonetheless, the principle upon which Stoic philosophy, behavior, and mental life rests is the same: the only thing we can control, and the only thing we are responsible for, is our own thoughts and actions, despite anything that happens to us.

It is another description of the devil of the Bible. There is no external force, only our own mind versus a world of distractions, temptations, and assaults, a world fully inhabited by selfish, short-sighted people.

# A COMMON STOIC THEME

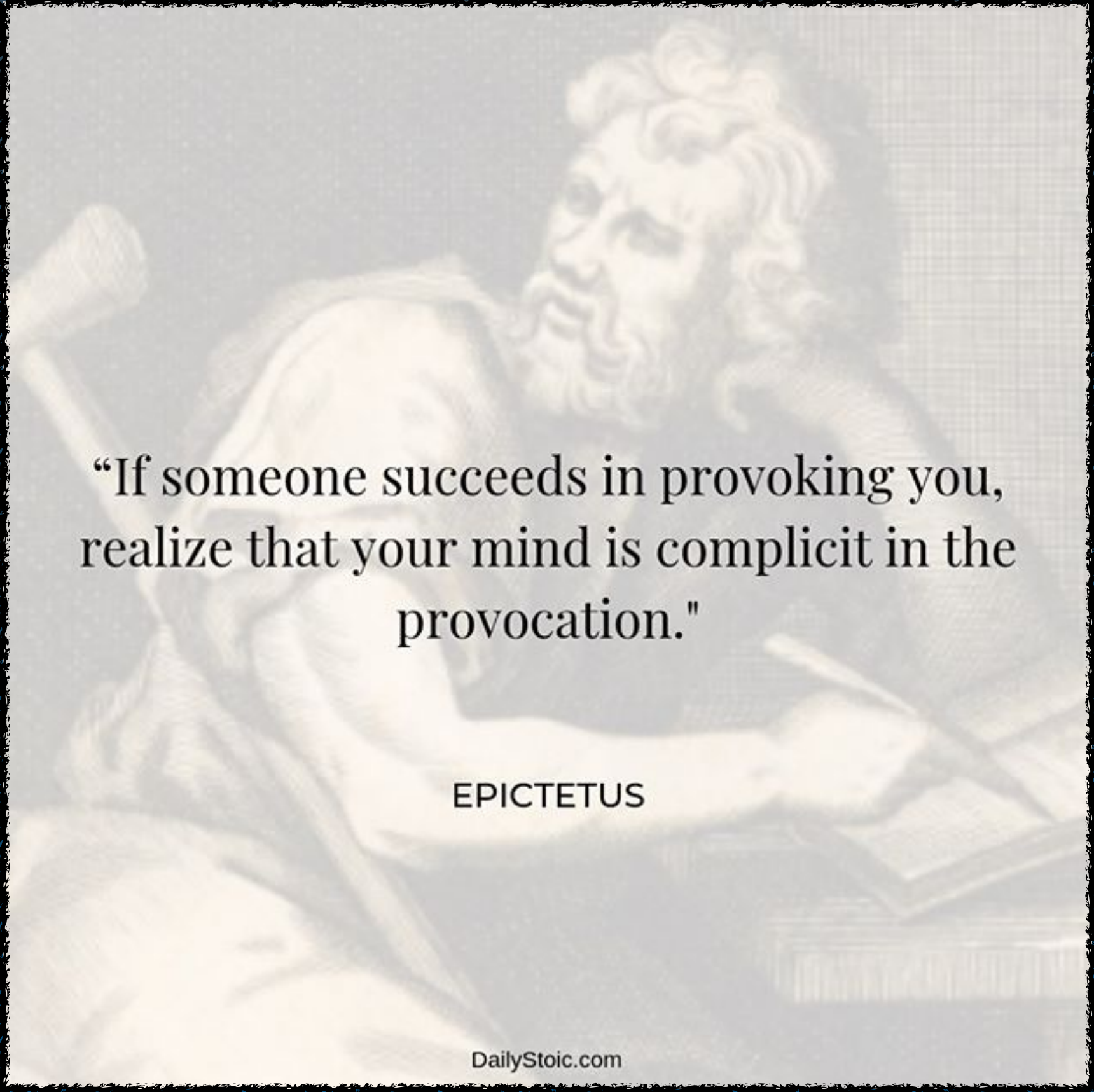


*If you are distressed  
by anything external,  
the pain is not due to  
the thing itself, but to  
your estimate of it;  
and this you have the  
power to revoke at  
any moment.*

*– Marcus Aurelius*



# LOCUS OF CONTROL: THE INTERPERSONAL DOMAIN



“If someone succeeds in provoking you, realize that your mind is complicit in the provocation.”

EPICTETUS

## SAID ANOTHER WAY

People are not  
disturbed by things,  
but by the views they  
take of them.

Epictetus

# ANXIETY: OUR MINDS CREATE OUR PROBLEMS

"We are more often frightened  
than hurt; and we suffer more  
from imagination than from  
reality."

---

SENECA

[dailystoic.com](http://dailystoic.com)



FOCUS ON **WHAT IS**, NOT **WHAT IF**.

*Therefore, do not be anxious for tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

*Jesus of Nazareth*

# THE PRIMACY OF IDENTITY

First say to yourself what you would *be*, then do  
what you would *do*.

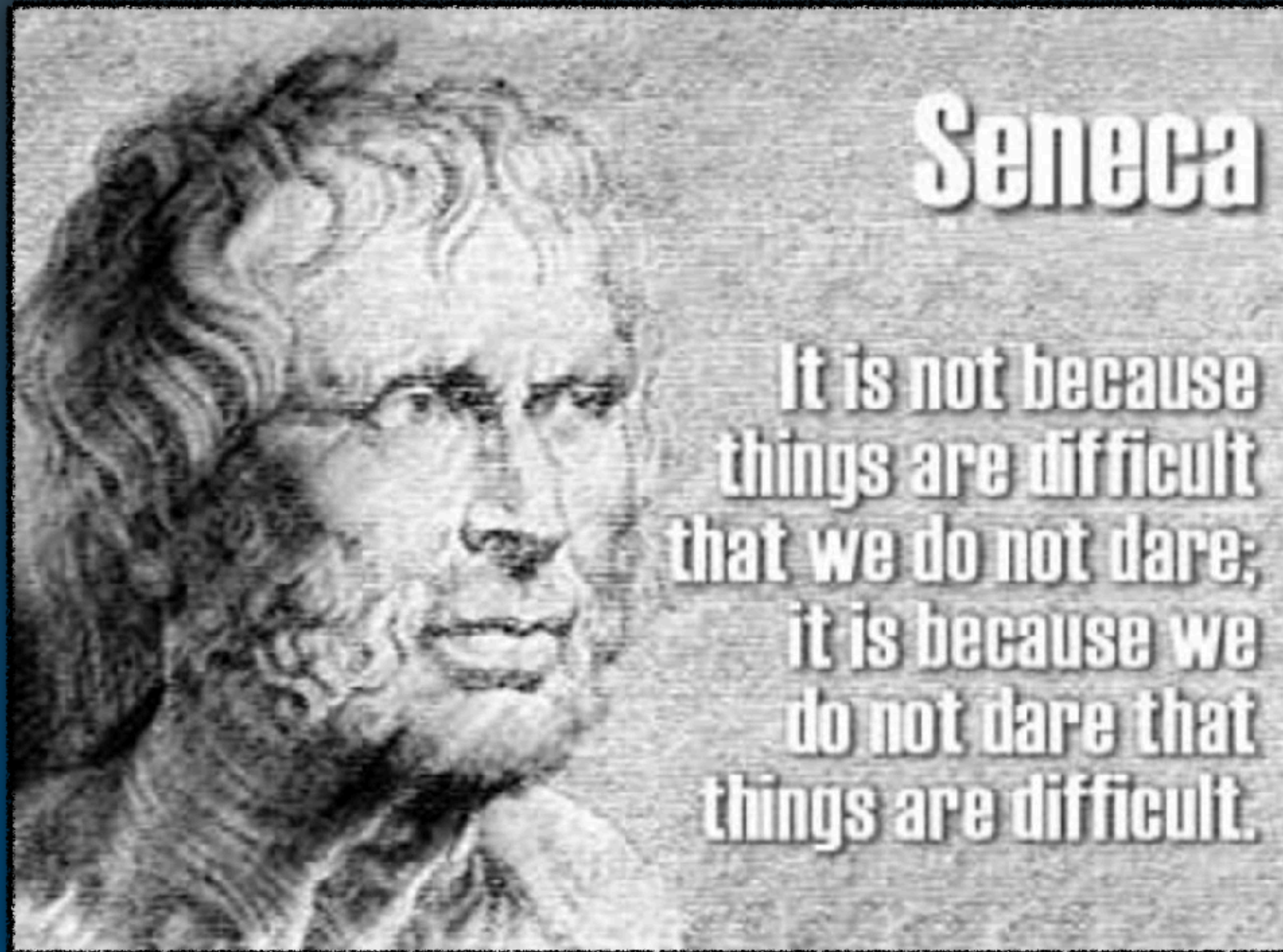
*Epictetus*

# JESUS TEACHES ABOUT IDENTITY

For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit.

*Luke 6:43-44*

WE CREATE OUR  
OWN BARRIERS



**Seneca**

**It is not because  
things are difficult  
that we do not dare;  
it is because we  
do not dare that  
things are difficult.**

DON'T LET FEAR CONSTRAIN  
YOUR LIFE

It is not **death** that a man  
should fear, but he should  
fear **never beginning to live.**

– *Marcus Aurelius*





## THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

- What was the basis of distribution?
- What risk did the two more endowed servants take?
- What was the stated reason for the least endowed servant to hide his money? What was the “real” reason?
- What was the lack of investment due to the servant’s ability or to his estimation of his master?

HOW DO WE LOOK AT THE  
TRIALS OF LIFE?

Misfortune nobly born is good fortune.

*Marcus Aurelius*

# SUFFERING NOBLY

- Job
- Paul
- Jesus

## SUFFERING NOBLY

- He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. 1 Pet. 2:22:23
- . . . “leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.” (v.21)

# WHAT IS THE SCRIPTURAL COUNTERPART?



The impediment to action  
advances action. What stands in  
the way becomes the way.

~ Marcus Aurelius

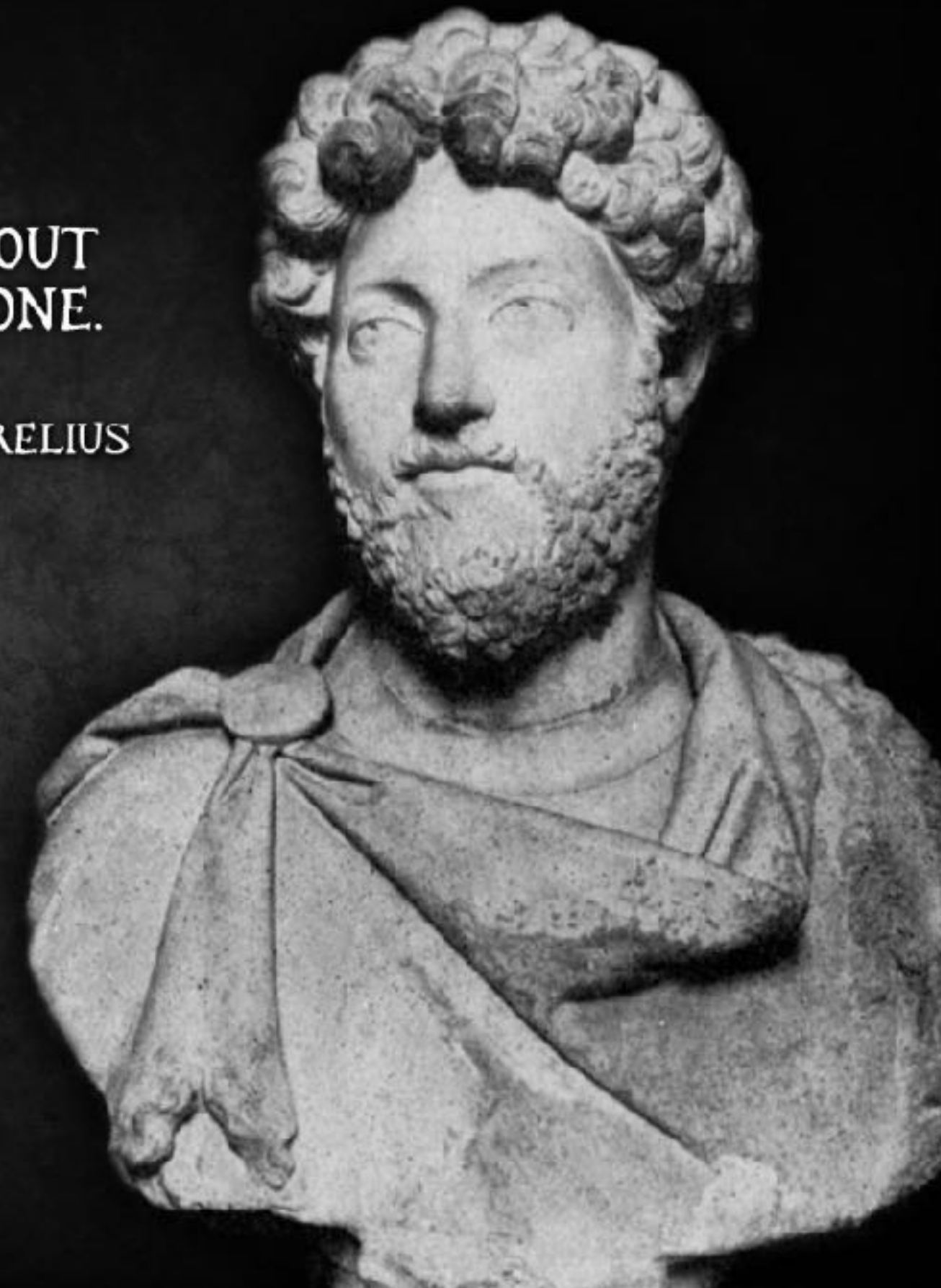
# OBSTACLES (HARDSHIPS, TRIALS) ARE THE WAY TO WHAT?

- Dependency on God *Psa. 46.1-3; II Cor. 1:8-9, 12:10*
- Character *Rom. 5:3-4*
- Increased Self-Efficacy
- Patience *Jam. 1:2-3.*
- Empathy *II Cor. 1:3-5*
- Flexibility, adaptability: Other Doors Will Open *Acts 16:6-10*

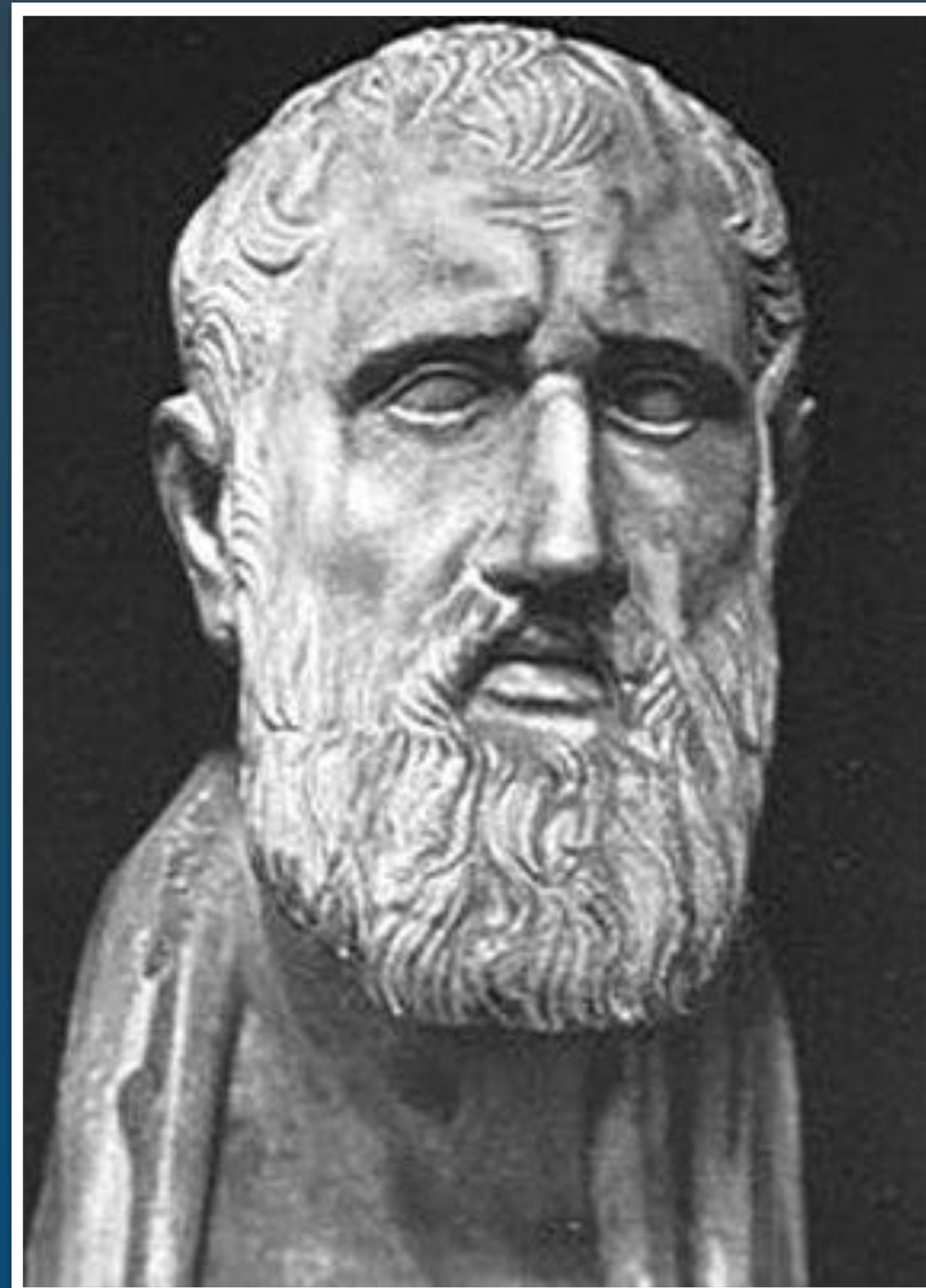
# BE DOERS OF THE WORD

WASTE NO MORE TIME ARGUING ABOUT  
WHAT A GOOD MAN SHOULD BE. BE ONE.

- MARCUS AURELIUS



ZENO, FOUNDER OF THE  
STOIC SCHOOL

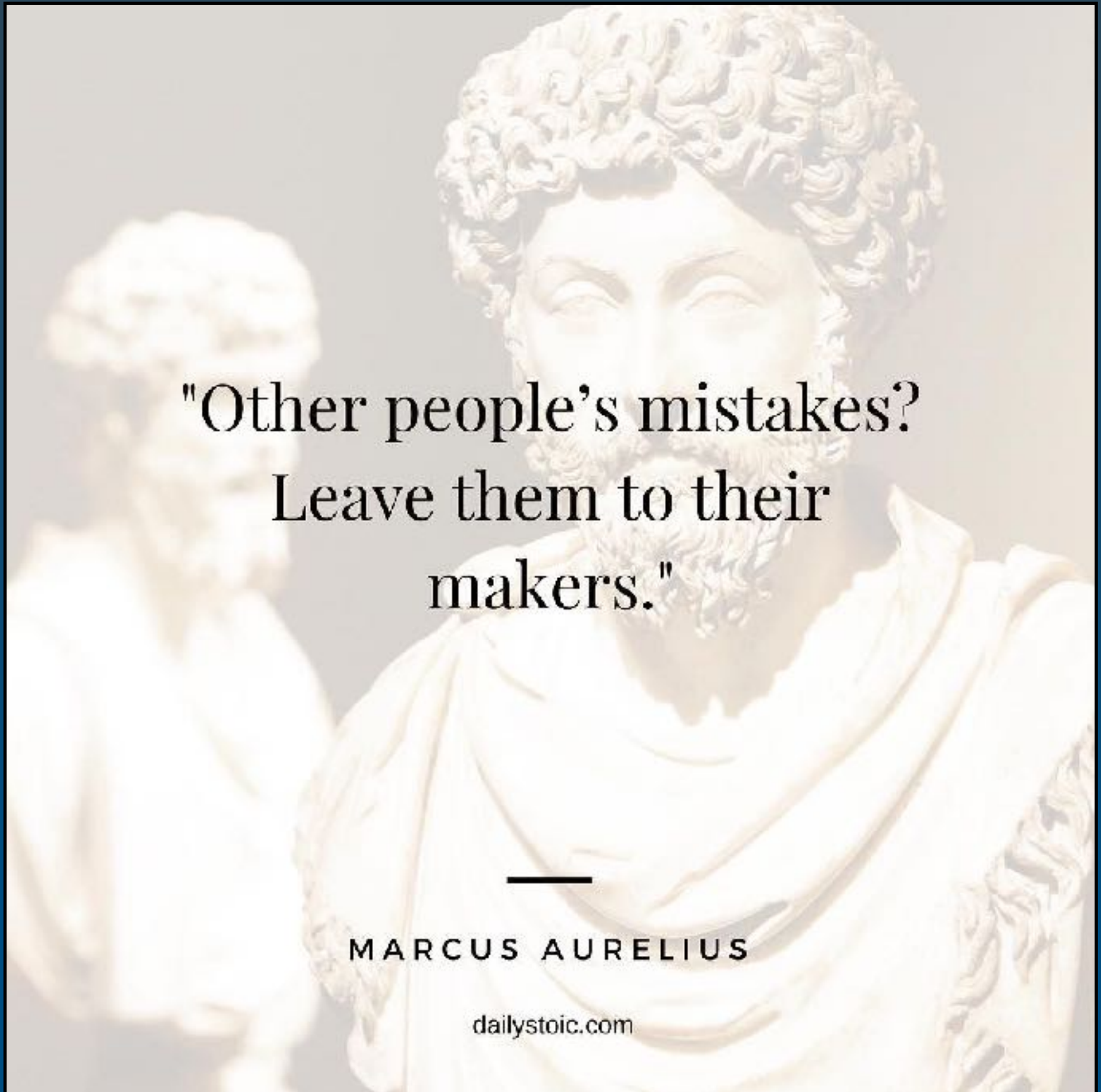


*"We have two ears  
and one mouth,  
so we should listen  
more than we say."*

**-Zeno of Citium**



# STOICISM ON JUDGING OTHERS



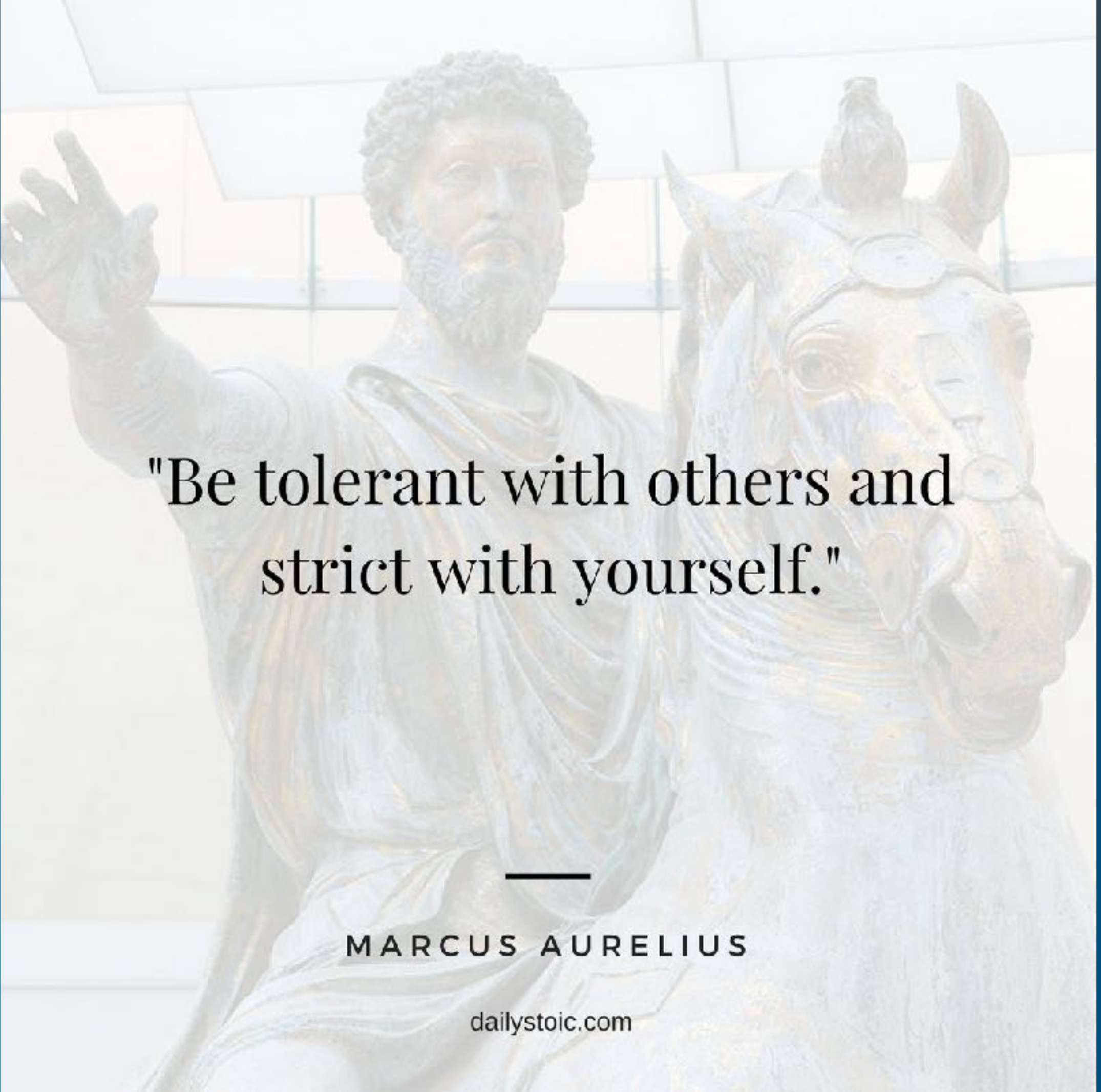
"Other people's mistakes?  
Leave them to their  
makers."

---

MARCUS AURELIUS

[dailystoic.com](http://dailystoic.com)

TAKE THE BEAM OUT OF  
YOUR OWN EYE

A faded, light-colored image of a classical statue of Marcus Aurelius on a horse. The emperor is depicted with a beard and curly hair, wearing a draped garment, and gesturing with his right hand. The horse is also depicted with a detailed harness.

"Be tolerant with others and  
strict with yourself."

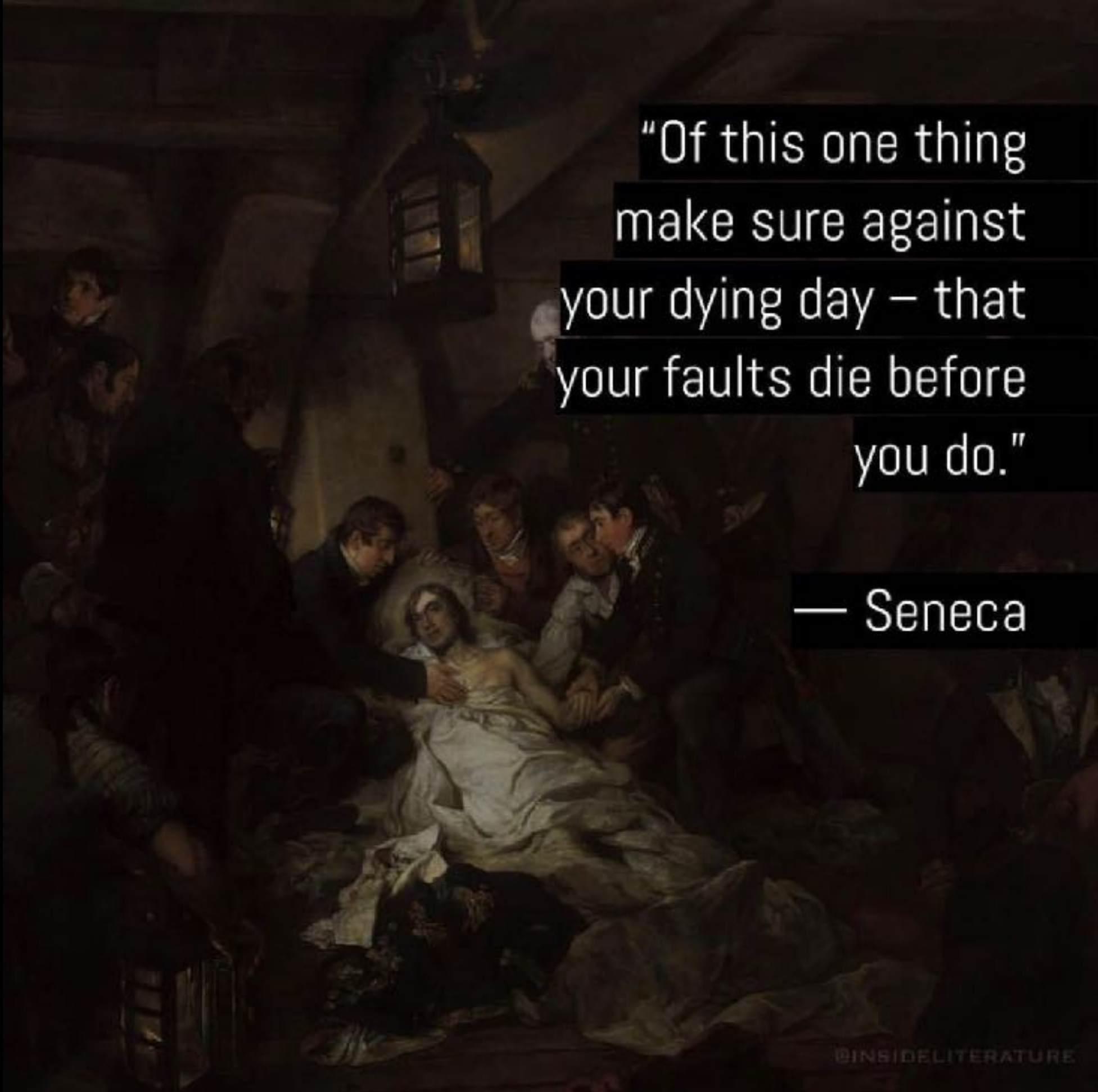
---

MARCUS AURELIUS

[dailystoic.com](http://dailystoic.com)



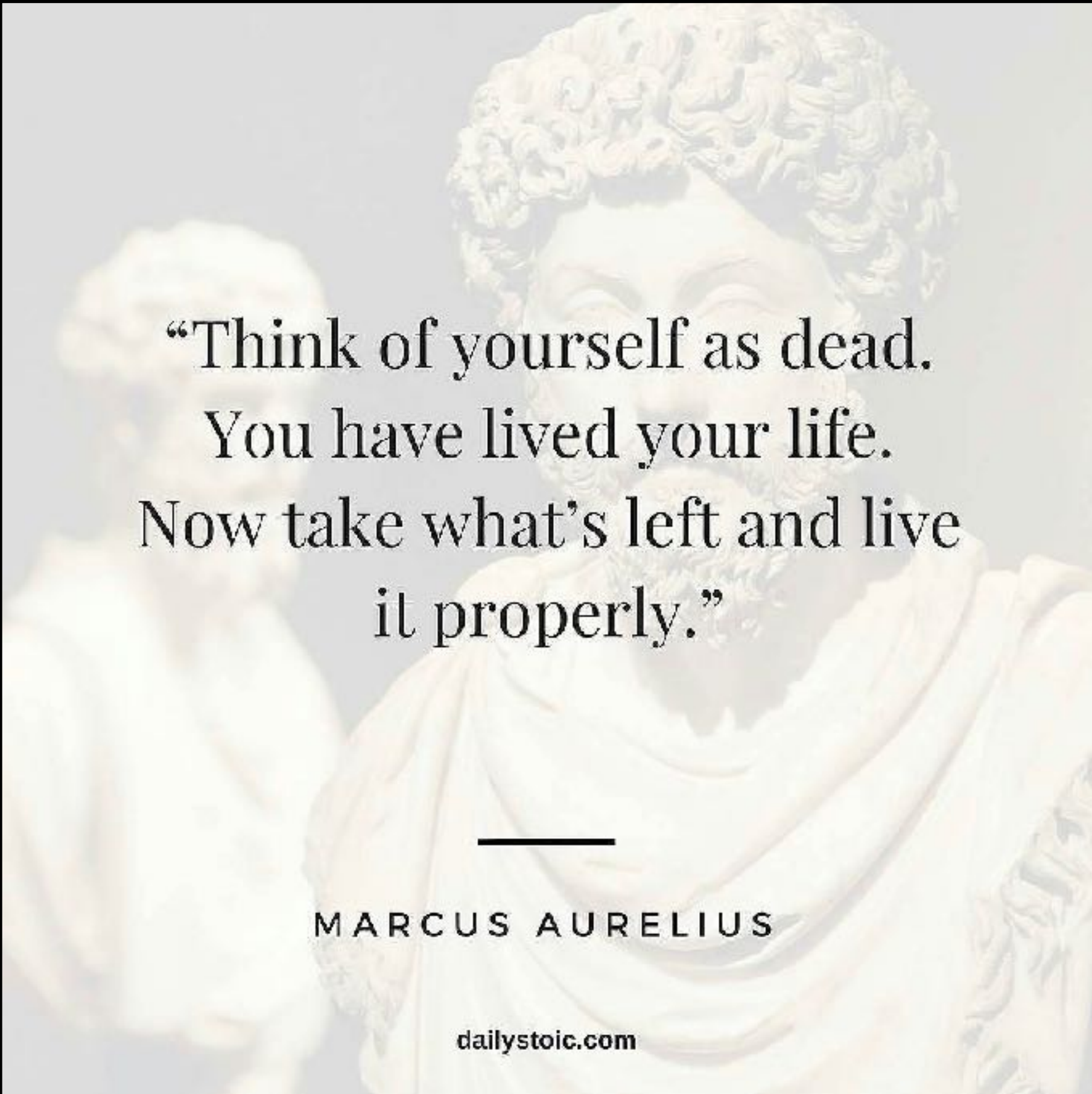
# SENECA ON THE DEATH OF OUR FAULTS



"Of this one thing  
make sure against  
your dying day – that  
your faults die before  
you do."

— Seneca

# MARCUS AURELIUS ON PUTTING YOUR FAULTS TO DEATH



“Think of yourself as dead.  
You have lived your life.  
Now take what’s left and live  
it properly.”

---

MARCUS AURELIUS

[dailystoic.com](http://dailystoic.com)

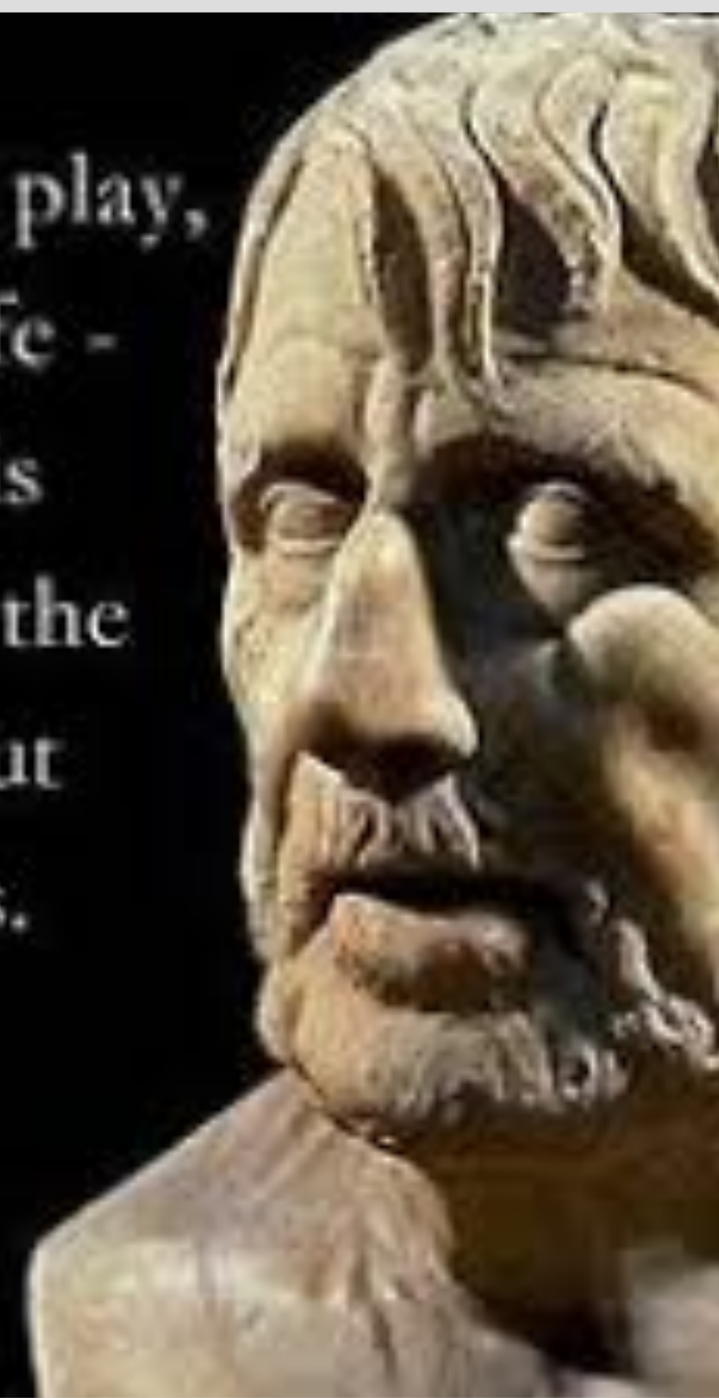
## THE BIBLE ON PUTTING OUR FAULTS TO DEATH

- SO YOU ALSO MUST CONSIDER YOURSELVES DEAD TO SIN AND ALIVE TO GOD IN CHRIST JESUS. ROM. 6:11
- THROUGH THE LAW I DIED TO THE LAW THAT I MIGHT LIVE TO GOD. GAL. 2:19
- PUT TO DEATH THEREFORE WHAT IS EARTHLY IN YOU: SEXUAL IMMORALITY, IMPURITY, PASSION, EVIL DESIRE, AND COVETOUSNESS, WHICH IS IDOLATRY. COL. 3:5

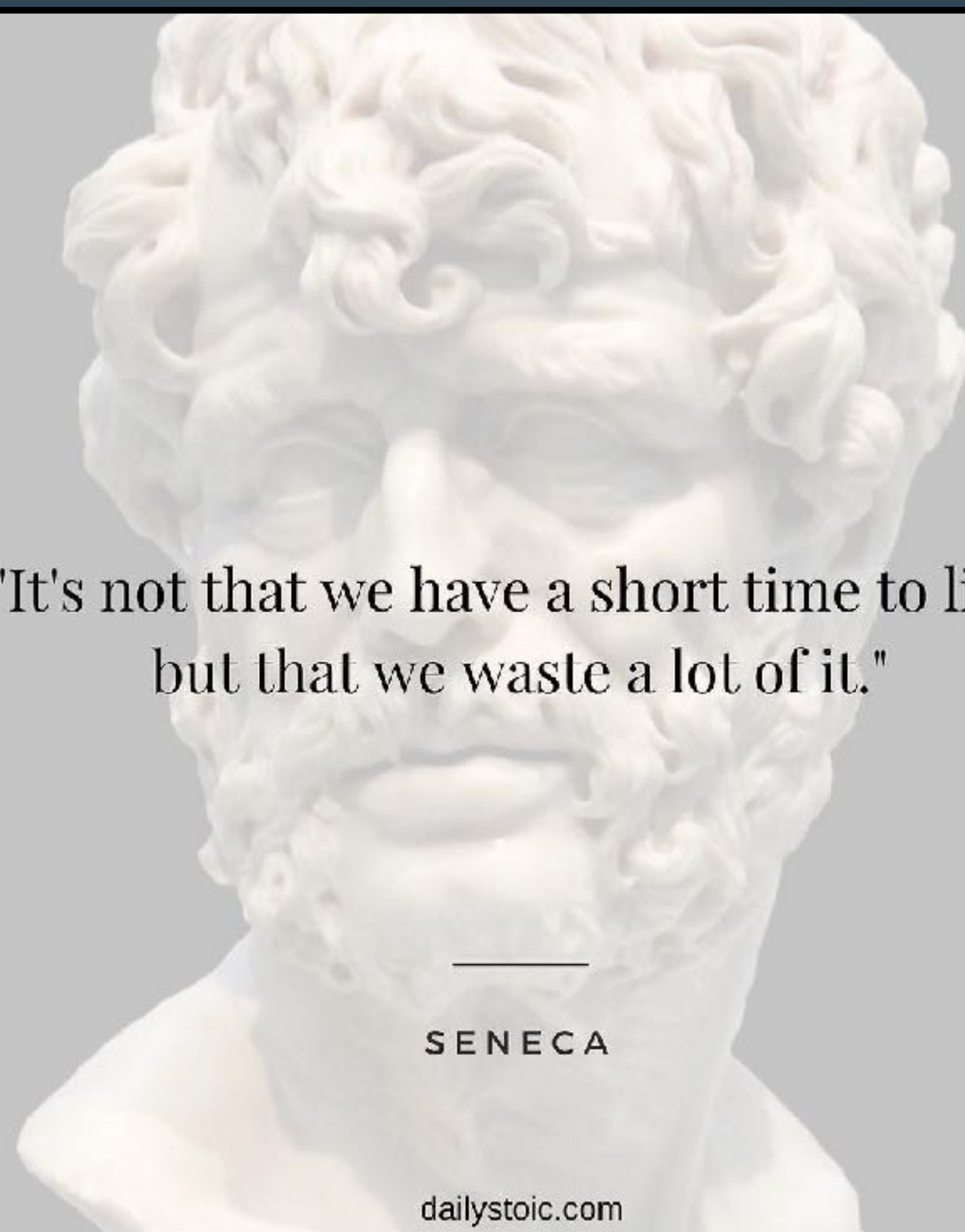
# SENECA ON THE BREVITY OF LIFE

As it is with a play,  
so it is with life -  
what matters is  
not how long the  
acting lasts, but  
how good it is.

- Seneca



# SENECA ON USING OUR TIME WELL



"It's not that we have a short time to live,  
but that we waste a lot of it."

---

SENECA

[dailystoic.com](http://dailystoic.com)



# A ROMAN EMPEROR ON THE BREVITY OF LIFE

**Live not as though there  
were a thousand years ahead  
of you. Fate is at  
your elbow; make yourself good  
while life and power are  
still yours.**

*Mook*  
Marcus Aurelius

# PSALM 90 ON THE BREVITY OF LIFE

The years of our life are seventy,  
or even by reason of strength eighty;



yet their span is but toil and trouble;  
they are soon gone, and we fly away. (Psalm 90:10)

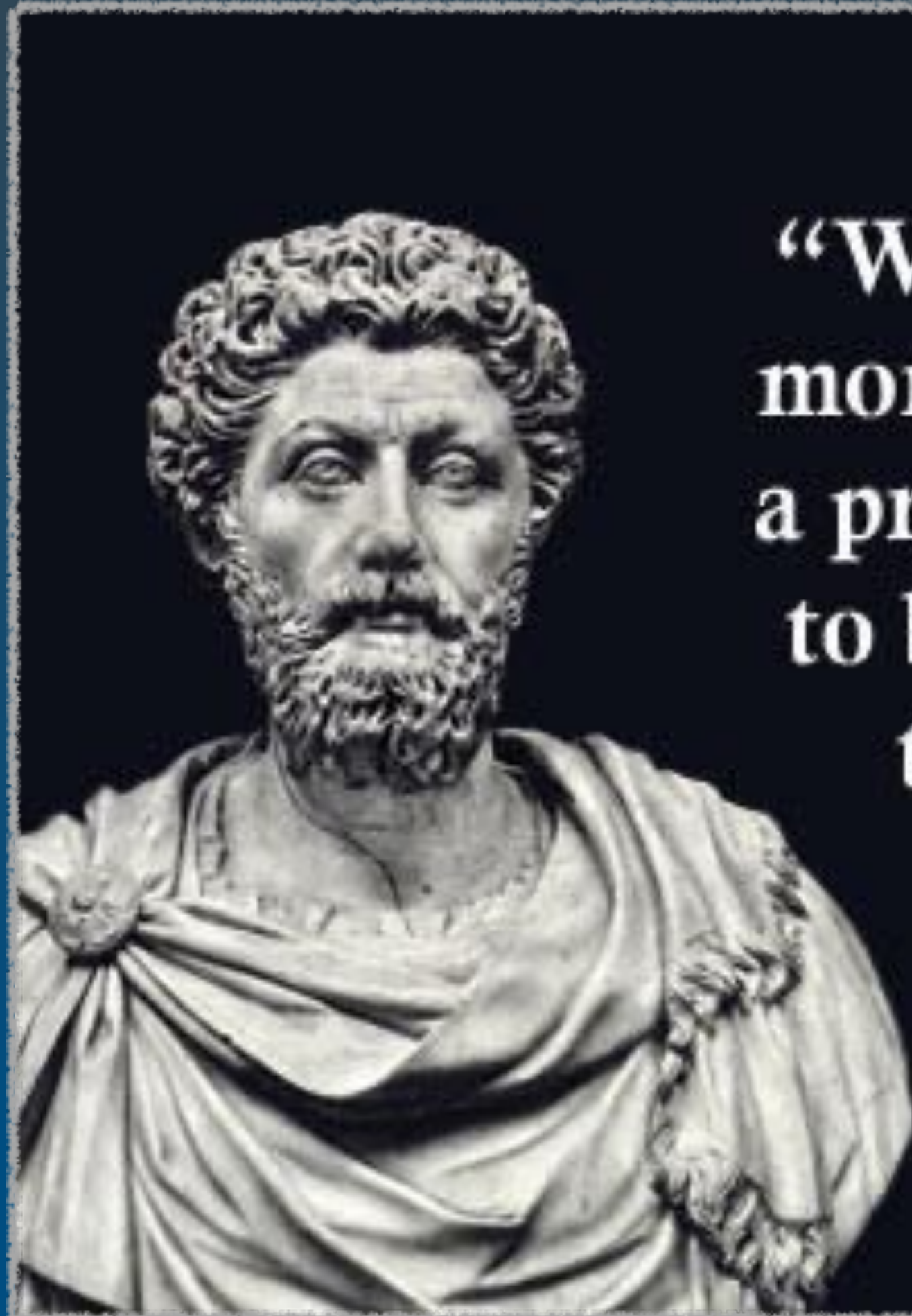
# PSALM 90 ON THE BREVITY OF LIFE

**"SO TEACH US TO  
NUMBER OUR  
DAYS, THAT  
WE MAY  
APPLY OUR  
HEARTS UNTO  
WISDOM."**



PSALM 90:12 (KJV)

# A ROMAN EMPEROR ON GRATITUDE



**“When you arise in the morning, think of what a precious privilege it is to be alive - to breathe, to think, to enjoy, to love.”**

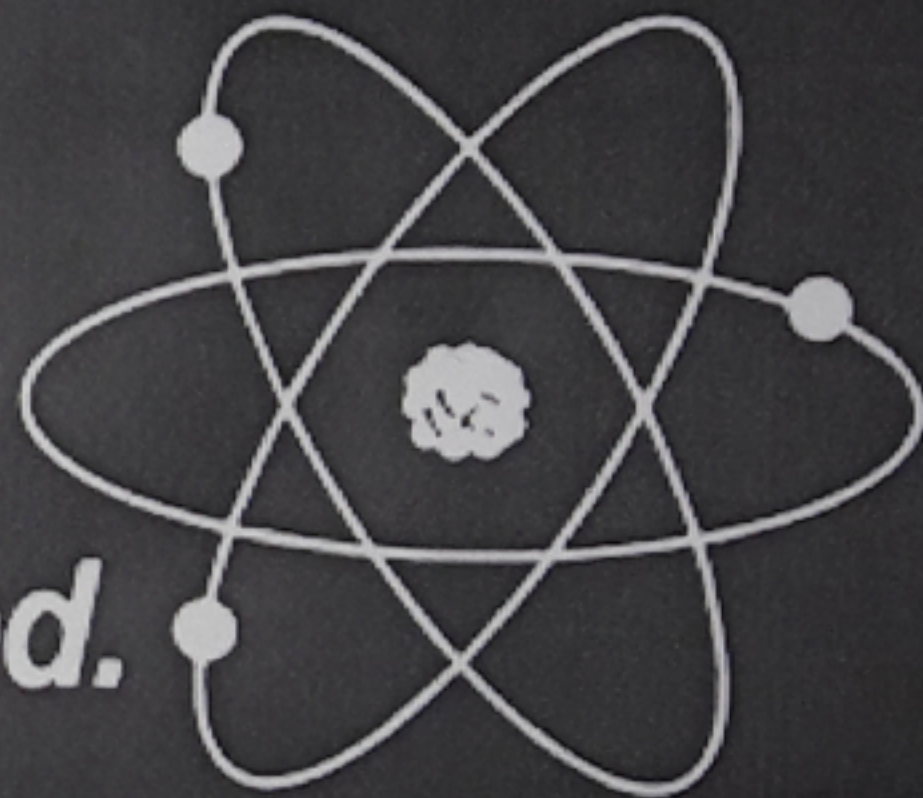
**-MARCUS AURELIUS**

# FOUR ESSENTIAL, ACCESSIBLE STOIC WORKS

- Seneca: **Letters from a Stoic**
- Epictetus: **Discourses and Enchiridion**
- Marcus Aurelius: **Meditations**

# YOU MATTER

*Until you multiply  
yourself times the  
speed of light squared.*



# THEN YOU ENERGY