Expanded Guide: A Life You Can Sustain

On Stoic Living Discussion Series · Guide 12 of 12 · December

For facilitators. Read before the meeting, after the Meeting Primer and the core reading (about 15 minutes).

The Meeting Primer introduces the readings and terms. The meeting guide provides timing. This guide connects a considered response with the wider question of how to live by sound judgment consistently across our commitments.

What the discussion and application are for

Examine the whole undertaking, the attraction of being asked, and consistent consideration across work and family. Reach living Stoicism through temperance and sustainable commitments; do not introduce a personal practice-planning layer. Keep temperance in action central: reasons, priorities, and conduct should agree across commitments. Preserve the broader Q5 inquiry without cues, recurring practice occasions, or review-point planning.

December brings Assent, Desire, and Action together in a considered response. The questions serve one choice. They help expose how a claim about the task, a wish for approval, and an offer of help can support or undermine one another.

The case comes from Week 48. A working group offers useful work, but accepting it would interrupt the nightly ritual of reading to the youngest child before bed. We do not know the whole undertaking yet. The group should find out what it requires before deciding which answer fits.

Week 48 weighs an undertaking and carries out what is kept. Week 49 applies the same standards across responsibilities and people. Week 50 integrates judgment, desire, and action. This meeting uses Week 50's three questions on Week 48's ordinary request, with Week 49's attention to the people affected.

Weeks 51 and 52 inform the closing reflection on living Stoicism. The fifth question reaches that theme through temperance: Stoic practice is also a commitment, with demands we can overestimate and standards we can apply unevenly. A newcomer can answer from the working-group case or any familiar commitment.

Keep Action primary. A thoughtful account of the facts and a well-ordered aim should reach a fitting response. The response might seek a missing fact, give a bounded offer, or decline plainly. It needs an act and a realistic arrangement for follow-through.

A sustainable life requires more than manageable amounts of work. It asks whether the commitments deserve their place and whether we keep faith with the people affected. Stoicism belongs within that life: its standards should inform how we answer colleagues, care for family, and carry out what we accept. The discussion can reach this broader understanding through the ordinary yes in the case.

Leading it Socratically

- **Ask what is known before accepting the request's shape.** "A meeting on Tuesday" may hide preparation, a deadline, and further work.
- **Hear the attraction.** Being useful and being valued may both matter. Ask which purpose is governing the offered yes.
- **Bring absent people into view.** A colleague's request is immediate; the people whose time would be displaced also have claims.
- **Use one standard across relationships.** Ask whether the reason could be defended to everyone affected.
- **Give the decision an action.** Hear the actual answer and what the person would do after giving it.
- **Connect commitment with character.** Ask what the undertaking requires of the whole person and whether its standards hold across work, family, and Stoic practice itself.

0–10 minutes — Open and encounter the case

Welcome everyone, explain the discussion agreements, and read the case aloud:

> A colleague asks you to join a working group that meets on Tuesday evenings. You are good at the work, you like being asked, and you have already said yes to two things this month. It's only one night a week, but this will interfere with your nightly ritual of reading to your youngest before bed. "Yes" is forming before you have weighed any of it.

Ask the opening question printed in the meeting guide. Hear two or three interpretations without settling them. Carry the differences straight into question 1. Prior weekly experience is welcome, but everyone has the facts needed here; no personal disclosure or practice report is required.

10–55 minutes — Discussion: five questions

Examine the whole undertaking, the attraction of being asked, and consistent consideration across work and family. Reach living Stoicism through temperance and sustainable commitments; do not introduce a personal practice-planning layer. Hear competing reasons

before introducing the full application method. The follow-ups are resources for inquiry, not a script that must all be completed.

Each question has a purpose, two follow-ups, and something to listen for. The first follow-up is the booklet's probe.

1. What are you assuming about what this commitment requires?

Purpose: examine the account of the undertaking before deciding.

- What would you need to learn before giving an informed answer?
- What can the invitation establish about your capacity, and what remains yours to assess?

Listen for the whole task, including preparation, attention, and follow-through. A flattering request can make the work seem more manageable than the available facts show.

2. What do you want from being asked, and what should govern your answer?

Purpose: make character's priority concrete within an attractive undertaking.

- What would remain worth choosing if the colleague gave no approval?
- How might wanting to be needed affect which demands you are willing to notice?

Listen for a useful contribution distinguished from the wish to appear useful. Both may be present. Ask which should guide the response when they pull apart.

3. What does one ethical standard require across these responsibilities?

Purpose: include relevant claims consistently across relationships.

- Who is absent from the conversation but affected by your yes?
- What difference in urgency or obligation could justify a different answer?

Listen for fair consideration for the colleague and the family. Identical answers are unnecessary when the facts differ. An absent person's claim still deserves the same serious reading.

4. What response could you carry through with the capacity you actually have?

Read Discourses 3.2.1–5 here, as the group considers a response it could carry through. Ask how what is accepted, wanted, and done can support or undermine one another. Epictetus gives the fields in the order desire, conduct, assent; our exercise uses a teaching order for this choice.

Purpose: bring the examination into fitting conduct. A reduced contribution can be considered as a hypothetical possibility here; the colleague's specific offer arrives during application.

- What would completing the reduced contribution involve?
- If you later discovered a conflict, what would you need to communicate or renegotiate?

Listen for an offer bounded by a real task and occasion. A clear no or an honest question can be appropriate too. The response needs follow-through that fits what was promised.

5. What does temperance ask of us when we live Stoicism as a way of life?

Purpose: reach Stoicism as a way of life through measured commitments and consistency of character.

- What have you taken on that you couldn't sustain, and what has lasted?
- Where could you keep a commitment outwardly while setting aside the standards that gave it its purpose?

Listen for what makes a commitment worth sustaining, including its demands on other people and the character expressed in keeping it. The working group can be well managed while family promises are neglected. Stoic practice can likewise become another overloaded undertaking or a standard applied only where convenient. Ask what temperance requires of the whole life these commitments belong to. A newcomer can use any commitment they know.

Going deeper, for a room that is ready: Where have judging, wanting, and acting come together in how you live? Members can consider the year, the time they have actually participated, or the shared case. Ask what became possible when judgment, aim, and conduct supported one another.

55–80 minutes — Application: examine, aim, and carry out

Compare a clear decline, a question before commitment, or a bounded contribution. Use Examine → Aim → Carry out once to test one response aloud. Introduce the draft-review offer later and reassess its demands before assuming it solves the conflict.

Keep temperance in action central: reasons, priorities, and conduct should agree across commitments. Preserve the broader Q5 inquiry without cues, recurring practice occasions, or review-point planning.

Keep sample responses in reserve until participants have offered and questioned their own accounts. Use the method once to test the discussion's conclusions.

Use two volunteers for a short conversation if they wish. One asks, "Can we count you in?" The other can pause to consider the three questions before answering.

1. Examine. What am I accepting, and what grounds support it? Ask what the case establishes and what the person may be assuming. The invitation specifies meeting time but not the whole workload.

> **Sample response:** "I know the group meets on Tuesdays and that the meetings would interrupt our nightly bedtime reading. I don't yet know the preparation or deadline. Being

> invited doesn't establish that I have room to do the work well."

Ask what question would obtain the missing information. "What would you need from me between meetings?" can be a fitting next action. It leaves the eventual answer open while taking the task seriously.

2. Aim. What am I trying to secure, and what virtue should govern it? Hear the wish to contribute and any desire to be regarded as indispensable. Then include the people whose existing claim may be less visible.

> **Sample response:** "I'd like to make a useful contribution and be thought dependable. I want honesty and fair consideration to govern what I offer, including the time I've already promised at home."

The same standard can lead to different arrangements. Ask what facts would justify that difference. Someone else's approval can be welcome without supplying the reason for accepting.

3. Carry out. What fits now, and how will I perform and follow through? Have someone give an answer they could act on. They might ask for more information before committing, decline, or offer a limited contribution.

> **Sample response:** "I can't join those meetings. I can ask whether reviewing a draft would help, but I need its length and deadline before promising that."

Ask what happens after the sentence. If the colleague provides the information, the person must weigh the reduced task too. If they accept it, they need time to do it. A tactful offer that never reaches the work leaves the responsibility unfinished.

The reveal (if time allows). The colleague says you could review the draft report without attending the meetings. A relevant change has arrived.

> **Sample response:** "That removes the meeting conflict, but I still need to know the reading time, what kind of comments you need, and when it is due. If it fits my existing commitments, I can offer that part and then carry it out."

Rehearse the first follow-up question and a possible bounded answer. The reduced task should preserve the person's existing responsibilities. Its smaller size alone does not establish that it fits.

80–90 minutes — Close

Ask what became clearer or what question remains unsettled. Invite the reason for a changed view, and let a well-supported disagreement remain. End with the single take-home invitation and a brief transition to the next theme. The full method has already appeared during application; do not repeat its steps as an assignment.

Misunderstandings to watch for

IF YOU HEAR…	THE MISUNDERSTANDING	TRY
“Doing less means always saying no.”	Reducing activity is the ethical aim.	Ask what the situation requires and what the person can fulfill.
“Helping the group excuses the displaced promise.”	A new social aim overrides existing claims automatically.	Bring the absent people into the same account.
“The same standard means identical answers.”	Consistency ignores relevant differences.	Ask which need, deadline, or commitment justifies the difference.
“I’ve thought it through, so my part is complete.”	Examination establishes execution.	Ask what happens after the intended answer.
“A smaller offer must be sustainable.”	Size alone establishes fit.	Ask what the reduced task requires and displaces.
“Living Stoicism means taking on more exercises.”	More activity establishes a philosophical life.	Ask how the standards affect the commitments already being kept.
“I joined too late to answer.”	Reflection requires a year of participation.	Invite any familiar commitment or use the shared case.

Facilitating the people in the room

WHO	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	TRY
The eager contributor	Says yes because being asked feels rewarding.	Ask for the whole undertaking before the offer is made.
The overextended member	Wants to take on more while existing commitments suffer.	Ask what each undertaking requires and whose time makes it possible.
The uneven helper	Gives a colleague a hearing denied to someone at home.	Ask whether the same reason could be defended to both.

WHO	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	TRY
The reflective planner	Describes an intention without an act.	Ask what they would actually say and then do.
The strict decliner	Treats every refusal as temperance.	Ask what useful contribution the circumstances may still require.
The expert	Proposes a full annual system for everyone.	Ask how its standards would shape the ordinary commitments in the case.
The talker	Reviews their year before others can enter.	Invite a short observation and another willing voice.
The newcomer	Wonders whether they have enough experience.	Let the case supply the occasion and welcome a first attempt.

When the close feels personal. Some members will have practiced for months and others for one meeting. Invite what is useful from the period they actually know. Passing or a made-up example remains welcome. Invite inquiry into what makes a commitment worth keeping and how it affects the people involved.

Questions you may be asked

“Is this a new exercise for every decision?” Use it for one choice that deserves deliberate attention, especially where assumptions, approval, or competing responsibilities make the fitting response unclear. The questions work together on that occasion.

“Does living Stoicism mean doing more exercises?” Exercises help us learn to judge, want, and act well. Their purpose reaches into the commitments we already hold. Temperance asks whether the demands we accept are measured and whether the same ethical standards guide us across our lives.

“Can I answer if this is my first meeting?” Yes. Consider any commitment you have kept, changed, or found hard to sustain. The shared case also supplies a choice where capacity, character, and other people matter.

“How do I know the practice is helping?” Look at a particular occasion: what claim you examined, what priority guided you, and what you carried out. Include an unchanged difficulty or a correction still owed. A feeling of improvement alone leaves those questions open.

“Does sustainable mean comfortable?” A worthwhile commitment can remain demanding. Consider its purpose, your capacity, what it displaces, and how it is carried out. A justified adjustment can preserve care for the responsibility and the people affected.

Adapting the practice and discussion

- **Mostly newcomers.** Stay with the working group. Ask for one question before commitment, one governing virtue, and one clear answer.
- **Mostly experienced members.** Invite a brief account of an actual choice, then compare how its judgment, aim, and execution fitted together.
- **Online.** Read the three questions aloud and rehearse the short conversation with volunteers.
- **A large group.** Let pairs prepare a bounded answer for the same request, then hear the action each would take after giving it.
- **Short on time.** Skip the reveal or shorten question 3. Preserve follow-through and the connection between temperance and a sustainable way of living in question 5.

After the meeting, send a short recap through your group's usual channel with one or two insights or open questions and the single take-home invitation. Experiences and fresh questions are equally welcome at the next meeting.

Source lessons: On Stoic Living, Weeks 48–50; Weeks 51–52 inform the closing reflection on living Stoicism.