Inspired by Epictetus — A Contemporary Interpretation

How much longer are you going to wait before you expect the best of yourself? Before you commit to living according to your own principles, guided by reason rather than impulse, fear, or convenience?

You already know what matters. You have thought about it, examined it, and decided what you believe is right. So what are you waiting for? Who else needs to tell you what to do? What teacher, mentor, or authority are you still hoping will come along and give you permission to become the person you know you ought to be?

You are no longer a child. You are an adult, responsible for your own choices and the direction of your life.

If you continue to make excuses, avoid difficult decisions, and put off the work of improving yourself, the days will pass whether you are ready or not. You may not even notice how little progress you are making. And eventually, you will reach the end of your life having never become the person you were capable of being.

So make a decision. Starting today, live as someone who takes responsibility for their own development. Decide what is right, what is reasonable, and what is worth pursuing. Then hold yourself to those standards, especially when doing so is difficult.

When you face hardship, temptation, criticism, praise, success, or failure, remember that these are not interruptions to your development. These are the very moments in which your character is formed and revealed.

The challenge is not somewhere in the future. It is here, now, in the circumstances directly in front of you.

You are already on the field of life. The game has begun, and the clock is running. You cannot postpone your participation until you feel better prepared. You may already be in the second or third quarter, and there is no knowing how much time remains.

Every decision matters. Every response is an opportunity to practice the principles you claim to believe in. In any given moment, you can either strengthen the person you are trying to become or return to the habits you are trying to leave behind.

This is how great men live. They do not wait for ideal circumstances before practicing wisdom. They examine their thoughts, question their assumptions, and allow reason to guide their actions in the situations life presents to them. They observe, orient, decide, and act.

You may never become a great man. That is not the point. The point is to live as someone who is genuinely trying.

Not tomorrow. Not when life becomes easier. Not when someone else shows you the way. Now.

Here is Epictetus in his original language translated to English.

Epictetus - “How long are you going to wait before you demand the best for yourself and in no instance bypass the discriminations of reason? You have been given the principles that you ought to endorse, and you have endorsed them. What kind of teacher, then, are you still waiting for in order to refer your self-improvement to him? You are no longer a boy, but a full-grown man. If you are careless and lazy now and keep putting things off and always deferring the day after which you will attend to yourself, you will not notice that you are making no progress, but you will live and die as someone quite ordinary.

From now on, then, resolve to live as a grown-up who is making progress, and make whatever you think best a law that you never set aside. And whenever you encounter anything that is

difficult or pleasurable, or highly or lowly regarded, remember that the contest is now: you are at the Olympic Games, you cannot wait any longer, and that your progress is wrecked or preserved by a single day and a single event. That is how Socrates fulfilled himself by attending to nothing except reason in everything he encountered. And you, although you are not yet a Socrates, should live as someone who at least wants to be a Socrates."