Expanded Guide: When Wanting Turns Into Needing

On Stoic Living Discussion Series · Guide 2 of 12 · February

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

The Meeting Primer introduces the reading and terms. The meeting guide carries the flow and timing. Here you'll find the purpose of the inquiry, ways to examine competing priorities, and an application that tests understanding without requiring prior practice.

What the discussion and application are for

February trains our priorities. We notice what an outcome promises, examine whether living well depends on getting it, and practice wanting a good use of choice most. The shared table sale gives the group an outcome worth seeking and a virtue that could make pursuing it costly.

Keep the practical value of the external visible. The seller has reasons to want money, and a vague answer may seem to help them get it. Ask whether the value of a sale gives it authority over honesty. The relevant shift is in what someone most wants when these aims pull apart.

The current weekly sequence matters. Week 5 diagnoses the promise of desire and aversion. Week 6 tests whether a preferred result is necessary for living well. Week 7 qualifies the intention beforehand and practices willingness toward the facts as they arrive. Week 8 brings this into Two Missions: pursue what you prefer with reserve while wanting good character most.

People who know the lessons can describe what they tried. Newcomers can work through the table case without having read anything. An honest statement that the outcome still feels indispensable can begin an examination. Give it time before asking someone to name a more settled priority.

Progress concerns willingness to put character first, including when that could cost the result. A successful sale, a calmer feeling, or a polished reply alone cannot tell us how desire was ordered.

Leading it Socratically

- **Ask what the want promises.** "What would getting that give you?" helps someone see the judgment beneath a familiar goal. Stop when the answer is clear enough to examine.
- **Keep the reasonable preference.** Ask why the money matters. Distinguish its practical use from a claim that losing this sale would remove the possibility of living well.

- **Test the priority under refusal.** Someone may want honesty chiefly because it builds trust and helps a sale. Ask whether they would still want it if the buyer declined.
- **Restate without assigning a motive.** "You hope the sale would show your effort counted. Is that what you meant?" lets the speaker correct your interpretation.
- **Invite competing reasons.** Ask another participant what remains worth wanting. Let each person weigh their own priority.
- **Leave room for resistance.** A person can understand the Stoic view while finding it hard to want it. Ask which part is hardest to accept.

During question 3, the read-aloud passage presents a bath visit with two purposes. Have someone name what Epictetus wants to accomplish and someone else name what he wants to preserve. The class's labels, Two Missions, are a modern formulation. Use the bath as the ancient example underlying the exercise.

0–10 minutes — Open and encounter the case

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

> You're selling a dining table online. One leg wobbles. A buyer asks whether anything is wrong with it. You want a good price, and a vague answer might help.

Ask the opening question printed in the meeting guide. Hear two or three interpretations without judging them against the practice steps. Carry the differences directly into question 1. Personal experience is welcome; the case supplies common ground and nobody needs to report completed weekly practice.

10–55 minutes — Discussion: five questions

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

1. What does getting the sale seem to promise?

Purpose: bring the value judgment beneath a want into view.

- If you got the price, what would you expect it to settle?
- What might you be trying to avoid besides losing money?

Listen for distinct promises such as useful income, relief, approval, or proof of competence. The same goal can serve several wants. Ask the person which one matters in their account.

2. When does a reasonable preference become a demand?

Purpose: distinguish a reason to seek an outcome from dependence on it for living well.

- What would losing this sale seem to say about living well?
- What judgment or choice would remain available if this buyer declined?

Listen for a practical disadvantage turning into a verdict about the person's worth or future. Preserve the real disadvantage while asking whether it makes honesty or sound judgment unavailable.

3. What room does "if circumstances allow" leave in a serious intention?

Introduce the reading here, when the group is considering serious effort with allowance for obstruction. Read *Enchiridion* 4 aloud. Identify the bath visit Epictetus intends and the sound use of choice he wants to preserve through disruption. Return to question 3 and ask how that distinction bears on a sale. Two Missions is the modern teaching formulation used in the curriculum; the ancient passage supplies its underlying distinction.

Purpose: understand reservation and acceptance without making the task careless.

- How could you pursue the sale carefully while allowing for refusal?
- If refusal arrives, what might you still be insisting should be different?

Listen for a sincere allowance for obstruction alongside care for the task. Acceptance starts with the facts. Further effort can follow, while a new plan remains conditional too.

4. Why want honesty if it might cost you the sale?

Purpose: test whether character governs the pursuit or is valued only for an expected return.

- Would it still be worth wanting if the buyer thought poorly of you?
- What would be lost in obtaining the price through a misleading account?

Listen for the difference between wanting to appear honest and wanting to make an honest use of choice. Ask what value the choice would retain without approval.

5. What would show that your priorities were changing?

Purpose: locate progress in the direction of desire.

- Could you feel disappointed and still want to meet the situation well?
- Looking back, what could reveal which mission mattered most to you?

Listen for increased willingness to bear a lost sale for honesty, or a more precise recognition of where dependence remained. Someone who simply felt better may have learned something, but ask what changed in their valuation.

Going deeper, for a room that is ready: When does wanting to be honest become another way of wanting approval? Compare a wish to deserve trust with a demand that somebody

actually trust you.

55–80 minutes — Application: test the priorities

Return to the table sale. Invite two plausible accounts: a seller who values honesty because it might build trust and secure the price, and a seller who wants honesty to govern even if the buyer declines. Ask what each account most wants. Use the three steps once to test the distinction. Sample answers illustrate possibilities; they are not declarations participants must endorse.

1. Notice. What do I want or fear, and what does it promise? Let the group name practical income alongside possible approval, relief, or proof of competence. Do not assign an invented motive as the only explanation.

> **Sample response:** "The money would help with another purchase. I also hope getting the asking price would prove I handled the sale well."

2. Prefer. I would prefer this result, if circumstances allow. Compare receiving the asking price with losing this buyer. What useful difference would that make? What judgment or choice would still be possible? Distinguish the inconvenience from a claim that living well has become impossible.

> **Sample response:** "I would prefer a fair price. If the buyer declines, I can still judge the condition accurately and consider what to do with the table."

3. Re-aim. Whatever happens, I want to practice this virtue most. Ask what wanting honesty most would mean here. Compare it with wanting to appear honest so the buyer will trust you. The words can be similar while the priority differs.

> **Sample response:** "I want the buyer to understand the wobble accurately, even if that costs this sale."

The reveal (if time allows). The buyer says they may walk away if the table needs a repair. Ask which account of honesty survives that possibility and why. Someone may understand the distinction while still wanting the money most. Invite examination of what makes the result feel indispensable, without requiring a profession of changed desire.

> **Sample response:** "I would be disappointed to lose the sale. I can see that an honest use of the situation remains worth wanting, even though I do not yet find it easy to give it priority."

Keep the application focused on valuation and willingness. A sales script or successful negotiation cannot demonstrate the priority by itself. Finish by asking what the possibility of refusal revealed about the two accounts.

80–90 minutes — Close

Ask what became clearer or what remains unsettled. Invite a reason for a changed view and allow disagreement to remain. End with the single take-home invitation in the guide, then briefly introduce next month's theme. The steps have already appeared in application; do not repeat them as an assignment.

Misunderstandings to watch for

IF YOU HEAR…	THE MISUNDERSTANDING	TRY
"Then money shouldn't matter."	Moral value erases practical need.	"What can the money reasonably provide? What could it never establish about your character?"
"I'll stop wanting anything."	Training desire means abandoning every undertaking.	Return to the seller's useful goal and ask which aim should govern its pursuit.
"If circumstances allow means I needn't try."	Reservation excuses careless preparation.	"What effort does this worthwhile task still deserve?"
"Accepting refusal means liking it."	Willingness requires a pleasant feeling.	"Could you dislike the answer and still work with it?"
"Honesty always pays eventually."	Virtue is valuable because it secures a result.	"Suppose this time it costs you. What makes it worth wanting?"
"I said the right words, so I've done it."	Naming a priority establishes that desire has changed.	"When the sale was at risk, which mission did you most want?"
"I only noticed afterward."	Hindsight has no use.	"What did you then want, and what would you now like to give greater weight?"

Facilitating the people in the room

WHO	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	TRY
The practical provider	Points out what the money can pay for.	Hear the reason fully, then ask what it licenses in pursuing the sale.

WHO	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	TRY
The strict renouncer	Thinks every preference should disappear immediately.	Ask how they would choose carefully among things that affect their responsibilities.
The successful negotiator	Offers techniques to secure the price.	"What would your approach make honesty depend on?"
The disappointed member	Finds willingness hard after a real loss.	Offer the table case and allow time; avoid asking for a public statement of acceptance.
The virtue expert	Recites doctrine without examining the want.	"What would you expect the price to give the seller?"
The talker	Gives examples before others can enter.	Invite another willing speaker and allow passing.
The quiet member	May prefer to examine the case silently.	Ask which possible promise they would like the group to consider; a made-up one is fine.
The newcomer	Hears "indifferent" as uncaring.	Define it through the table's practical value and the seller's use of choice.

When an example is painful. Desires for security and belonging may involve difficult circumstances. Thank the speaker without pressing for details. Offer a pause, return to the table, or move on. Members choose what to share and which judgments to examine. Keep responses grounded in experience and inquiry.

Questions you may be asked

"Does needing food conflict with this?" Practical needs warrant care, provision, and help. February asks whether an external result is being treated as what makes a person live well in the Stoic sense of sound judgment and character. Start with the ordinary sale and acknowledge that hardship affects what someone can reasonably undertake.

"Does Epictetus actually teach Two Missions?" The name comes from Matthew Van Natta's modern teaching. On Stoic Living adapts it by making character the first mission. Epictetus's bath example supplies the underlying distinction between an external undertaking and preserving a good use of choice.

"Doesn't Epictetus tell beginners to suspend desire?" He does in *Enchiridion* 2. He still permits choosing and refusing lightly, with reservation. This meeting follows the curriculum's teaching adaptation: retain a reasonable external preference while learning to give virtue governing priority.

“If I still want the sale most, have I failed?” You have identified the priority you need to examine. Ask what the outcome promises and whether that promise justifies putting honesty second. Practice begins with an accurate account of what you want.

“Which mission do I name first?” An external task often catches your attention first. Name it, then identify the character that should govern it. The first mission has priority even when you notice it second.

Adapting the practice and discussion

- **Mostly newcomers.** Stay with the table. Define living well, preference, and reservation as they arise. Give questions 1, 2, and 4 the most time.
- **Mostly experienced members.** Ask what their actual exercise revealed about a preference. Use the reveal and the going-deeper question to test what still depends on approval.
- **Online.** Put the three steps in chat and invite short responses. Remind members that they can pass.
- **A large group.** Let pairs name the two missions for the same seller, then hear contrasting priorities without grading the pairs.
- **Short on time.** Skip the reveal and spend the remaining time on one preference, its promise, and the governing virtue.

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 5–8.