



**Jonas  
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# Focus on simple living

## Living simply

*Is it not madness and the wildest lunacy to desire so much when you can hold so little? (Seneca, Consolation to Helvia, 10)*

The Stoics favour a simple lifestyle—a lifestyle that fits our needs. Let's keep in mind that material things are ultimately indifferent. What matters is how we handle them.

## Does luxury corrupt?

While Epictetus and his teacher Musonius Rufus thought luxurious living corrupts people and must therefore be avoided completely, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius thought it's possible to live in luxury without being corrupted. They certainly agreed that luxury isn't necessary for the good life and must be handled thoughtfully.

Musonius Rufus advised to seek the necessary, not the extravagant. Clothes, for example, are here to protect our bodies, not to impress people. The same is true for our housing and furnishings. These things should be functional and do little more than keep out heat and cold, and shelter us from the sun and wind. Seneca likewise said that it makes no difference whether the house is built of turf or imported marble:

*What you have to understand is that that makes a person just as good as a roof of gold*

*does. (Seneca, Letters from a Stoic, 8)*

*Freedom is not achieved by satisfying desire, but by eliminating it. (Epictetus, Discourses, 4.1.175)*

It's our character that matters. Who we are and what we want to stand for. Let's keep in mind that living by values such as mutual respect, honesty, and justice are more valuable than wealth or external success. Stoics would never compromise their character to become wealthy. True wealth lies in wanting less, or, wanting what you already have.

*No person has the power to have everything they want," Seneca says, "but it is in their power not to want what they don't have, and to cheerfully put to good use what they do have." Our goal should be to "seek riches, not from Fortune, but from ourselves." (Letters from a Stoic, 123)*

## What if you are wealthy?

But what if you are financially wealthy like Seneca and Marcus Aurelius were? First of all, wealth must come honorably and be spent honorably, says Seneca, and adds:

*The wise man does not consider himself unworthy of any gifts from Fortune's hands: he does not love wealth but he would rather have it; he does not admit it into his heart but into his home, and what wealth is his he does not reject but keeps, wishing it to supply greater scope for him to practice his virtue.*

*(Seneca, On the Happy Life, 21)*

## Plain living, not penance

"Stoic philosophy calls for plain living, but not for penance," as author William Irvine put it. It doesn't ask to renounce wealth. It does ask, however, to use it thoughtfully and keep in mind that it's only borrowed from Fortune and can be taken away any moment.

*Receive without pride, let go without attachment," as Marcus Aurelius noted to himself (Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 8.33).*

Whether they have it or not doesn't make a difference to the Stoic.

Just like Minimalism, Stoicism calls for mindful possessing. It's not what you have, but how much you value what you have. Are you grateful for what you have? Can you let go of it freely? Or are you attached to those things?

Look around... is there something you don't need, something you don't value, something to get rid of? Make space – not for more stuff, but for more freedom and simplicity. Value the simple and necessary rather than the extravagant.

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