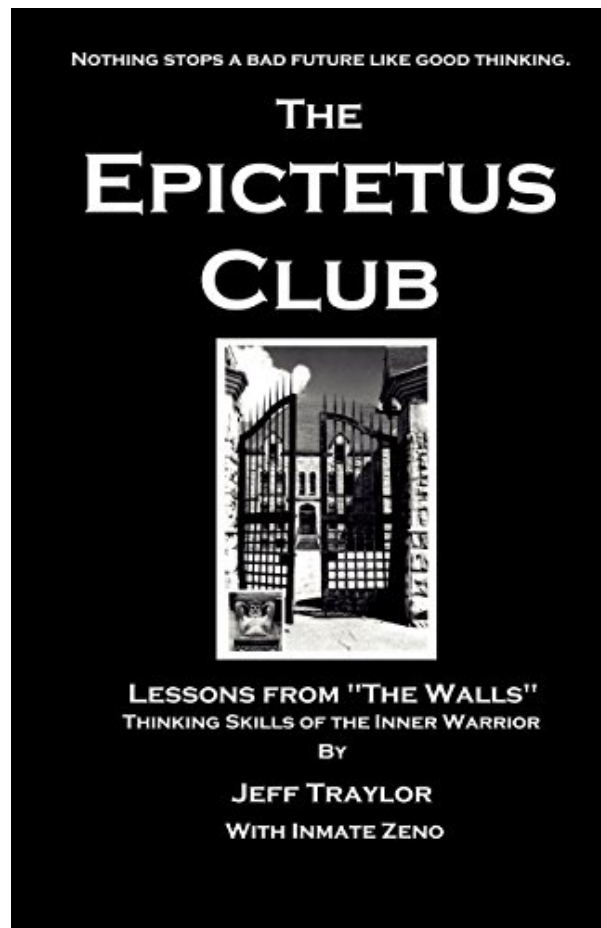


THE EPICTETUS CLUB: LESSONS FROM THE WALLS BY JEFF TRAYLOR



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NOTHING STOPS A BAD FUTURE LIKE GOOD THINKING.

THE EPICTETUS CLUB



LESSONS FROM "THE WALLS"
THINKING SKILLS OF THE INNER WARRIOR
BY

JEFF TRAYLOR
WITH INMATE ZENO

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About the Author

Jeff Traylor is a professional counselor who has worked at the Ohio Penitentiary, Marion (Ohio) Correctional Institution and a community-based correctional facility. He is the creator of a nationally recognized diversion program and the developer of institutional treatment programs. He holds a Masters degree in Guidance and Counseling from The Ohio State University.

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Take a fascinating look inside the old Ohio Penitentiary as you follow a group of inmates who meet weekly under the tutelage of a lifer named Zeno in a group called the Epictetus Club. The inmates study the teachings of this Greek philosopher, and with the help of his ancient wisdom they meet the daily challenges of their lives. Learning to think outside the limits of their own literal walls as they struggle to redeem themselves, the club members show us how to think beyond our own self-imposed limitations and comfort zones.

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Five Stars

By Tom Lillig

One of the most impactful books I've read!

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

A Light introduction to Stoicism

By Stoicism, Justice, and Truth

Set in Ohio State Penitentiary, *The Epictetus Club* is about a group of inmates that study and implement principles of Stoic philosophy to their lives, and use the lessons that they learn together to get through prison physically and emotionally unscathed. Led by a man known as Zeno (named after the great Stoic sage), the group learns to use psychological techniques such as "The ABCs of inner boxing" in order to master their thoughts, emotions, and desires, and in turn, themselves. The story is told through the eyes of author Jeff Traylor, a counselor at the prison who takes a fly-on-the-wall approach and watches, listens, and records the Epictetus Club group discussions.

Well told and effectively written, the book is an easy and interesting read that goes into surprising detail about the tenets of Stoic philosophy. For the uninitiated, it serves as a good introduction and example of how

to apply the ideas presented to the reader's own life.

The Epictetus Club leader and role-model, Zeno, is a man originally imprisoned for murder, but who then learned the ways of the Stoics and changed his life by changing his perceptions of people and events. Shortly after coming to prison, Zeno came upon a copy of *The Enchiridion*, by the ancient Stoic sage, Epictetus, and immediately saw the wisdom in its pages. Instead of using his boxing skills to attain respect, and therefore safety, in the harsh prison environment, he gained respect and admiration for the skills he learned from the practice of Stoicism. The tranquility that he achieved caught the attention of other inmates who wished to gain tranquility themselves, and he agreed to teach them. Thus, the Epictetus Club was born. Since he was a boxer before coming to prison, Zeno teaches the philosophy of Stoicism through the use of boxing analogies. When the attacking punch (self-defeating thought) presents itself, the Stoic responds with a block (an assessment of the true nature of the situation), then reacts with a counter-punch (replacement of the attacking thought with a productive thought).

Although the story is interesting and the characters well-developed, perhaps the most interesting part of *The Epictetus Club* is Stoicism itself. Mentioning and citing the works of major Stoic sages like Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, the book details Stoic ideals like living for a purpose, social responsibility, accepting life come what may, and consciously choosing to find the learning opportunity in any given situation.

Stoicism is not a religion, but a collection of ideas that attempt to construct a comprehensive philosophy of life. It argues that although it is easy to get distracted with unnecessary and illogical pursuits, life is about living in accordance with nature. Many people strive to become rich and accumulate an ever-growing stockpile of material possessions, but never reach true happiness. Stoics make the claim that the key to happiness is not things or status, but tranquility, which can be reached by controlling one's thoughts and desires. Instead of concerning ourselves with things and events that we have no control over, we should concern ourselves with understanding the true nature of things and adapting ourselves accordingly.

The only negative thing that I have to say about the book is the author's apparent obsession with Zeus, and Zeus' involvement in Stoic philosophy. Many Stoic sages lived in ancient Rome, and accordingly believed in and worshipped Zeus and other Roman gods of the time, but Stoicism is not a religion at all. In his writings, Epictetus mentions Zeus (sometimes metaphorically), and on the last page of the *Enchiridion* there is even a copy of his prayer to Zeus, but in no way is a Stoic, living in ancient times or now, obligated or even encouraged by Stoicism to worship any god or gods at all. Traylor seemed to miss this idea while writing *The Epictetus Club*, by mentioning Zeus repeatedly throughout the book, even occasionally praising him as though he had a hand in causing particular outcomes of situations. As I said, the book is an impressive piece, but the Zeus stuff is disappointing and unnecessary, in that it could work to offend some readers, perhaps even turning them off to Stoicism.

All in all, *The Epictetus Club* is worth every minute spent reading it. In the short period of time since I bought it, I have already borrowed it out once and had numerous discussions about the book and Stoicism itself. I would recommend both the book and Stoic philosophy to anyone who experiences disappointment, anger, frustration, or unhappiness.

This book and Stoicism encourage the ideals of life-long learning and development. In the spirit of those ideals, here are some important points of the book that I plan to consider for my own personal growth and development:

*"You can make your life a palace or a prison just by how you think." (p. 23)

*"If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you always got." (p. 26)

*"One's purpose does not have to be big and showy - the simplest things can have the greatest effects." (p. 56)

*"One of the signs of the dawning of self-mastery is the gradual elimination of blame." (p. 70)

*"There is no such thing as being the victim of another. You can only be a victim of yourself." (p. 75)

*"Assume all events happen to you for your good. All events contain an advantage for you if you look for it." (p. 79)

*"If you desire something that is beyond your control, disappointment will surely follow. Likewise, if you resist things that are beyond your control such as illness, death, or misfortune, you will also be disappointed." (p. 95)

*"We are in charge of ourselves, and no one can upset us without our cooperation." (p. 112)

*"Only the weak feel compelled to defend themselves or explain themselves to others. Let your good actions speak on your behalf. We can't control the impressions others form about us, and trying to do so only demeans us." (p. 115)

*"Other people have the freedom of speech - they can say whatever they want. In fact, I give them my permission!" (p. 122)

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

If you need a jump start, here it is!

By Shawn L. Williams

This book is no less than a wake call to anyone who needs to relook into their personal life. The ideas shared in the book may be geared towards inmates but any man/woman can read this book and find multiple ideas to add to their personal growing closet. Its a very easy read, and definitely will be read in a couple of days if not in one day. The main characters are brought to life and the all out external description of the prison is great. Buy it, rent it, steal it.....just read it!

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