

Know Thyself

The original ground rule in philosophy, the primary Delphic Maxim "Know Thyself". We call this self-reflection. Some people call it soul searching. David Goggins calls it having conversations with yourself. Others advise you to take a long hard look in the mirror. The point is that if you aren't honest with yourself, if you can't look under the hood and be real about who you are and what your motives are, then progress and improvement are not possible. Being critical of yourself and knowing that there is work to be done is the start of self-improvement. Without that self-awareness and humility, a person will have no reason to pursue improvement.

"If you wish to be good, first believe that you are bad".

-Epictetus

This quote from Epictetus takes "Know Thyself" to the next level. Starting with the assumption that you are bad, that you have flaws, and that you are on the wrong path. The biggest hurdle to knowing thyself is ego. It is a defense mechanism that protects your feelings at the expense of your self-improvement. People will tell themselves all kinds of lies in order to avoid facing a hard truth. For example, "I am lazy," "I am scared," "I'm not confident," or "I am selfish."

Ego will throw up tons of justifications and excuses in order to prevent you from reaching these conclusions. Why? Because facing those flaws is very uncomfortable, and it messes with your sense of certainty. Facing those flaws requires courage. Fixing those flaws requires discipline. It is very cool to me that two of the Cardinal Virtues come into play very early in the process of building a better life and a better character.

Why undergo this painful process of self-examination and the assumption that we are bad? Because that is the road that leads to mental health, wellness, and happiness. You MUST know that something is broken before you will ever try to fix it.

"It is part of the cure to wish to be cured."

-Seneca

Let ego go, start with the assumption that you are bad, foolish, misled, and wrong about things. If you are in fact good and on the right track, this won't hurt you at all. Truth can be challenged without fear. It can stand up to criticism and doubt. However, if you find a lot more evidence that you are bad, your worldview, thoughts, and actions have been misguided and wrong, great! You have time and resources to start making things better. You are free to change your mind, develop new habits, and grow into a person that you can be proud of. You can be the kind of person who has no use for ego or arrogance.

“If any man is able to convince me and show me that I do not think or act right, I will gladly change; for I seek the truth, by which no man was ever injured. But he is injured who abides in his error and ignorance”

-Marcus Aurelius

Amor Fati
- Sgt. Steve