

10 Lessons Marcus Aurelius Learned From His Father

Marcus Aurelius (121-180 A.D.), the last of Rome's Five Great Emperors, was in many ways the paradigm of Plato's philosopher king. His [*Meditations*](#) (essentially a diary written for himself) reveal a man striving for peace through wisdom, self-control, and stoical acceptance of the pain and pitfalls that accompany life.

In Aurelius' case, tragedy came early. His father, Marcus Annius Verus (III), died when Marcus was just 3 years old. Young Marcus was eventually adopted by Antoninus Pius, who would rule Rome as Emperor from 138 to 161. In his *Meditations*, Aurelius spends several pages discussing what he learned from his adopted father. Here is a sampling:

1. Be Decisive

"Unwavering adherence to decisions, once he'd reached them."

2. Despise Dependence

"Self-reliance, always."

3. Don't Make Excuses or Shirk Responsibility

"His willingness to take responsibility—and blame—for [the empire's needs and the treasury]."

4. Treat People Well and Listen to Them

"Compassion...His dogged determination to treat people as they deserved....Never [be] content with first impressions, or break off discussion prematurely... Never get fed up with them or play favorites. Put people at ease; don't be pushy."

5. Be Genuine

“No demagoguery, no currying favor, no pandering. Always sober, always steady, and never vulgar or prey to fads.”

6. Be Pious

“Religion. No superstitiousness.”

7. Reject Pederasty

“Putting a stop to the pursuit of boys.” (Pederasty was [pervasive](#) in the ancient Western world, particularly in Greece but also in Rome.)

8. Judiciousness in Politics

“A sense of when to push and when to back off.”

9. Don't Be Afraid to Depend on Others

“This, in particular: his willingness to yield the floor to experts—in oratory, law, psychology, whatever—and to support them energetically, so that each of them could fulfill his potential.”

10. Live Transparently

“He had so few secrets—only state secrets, in fact, and not at all that many of those.”

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