

UNITED WISDOM

Grief amid continuing everyday obligations

Meaning and Direction

Andrey Zarinsh & Maria Evilkut

P-15-N02 · EN

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

Grief amid continuing everyday obligations

Epigraph

> *“Bear ye one another's burdens”.*

Galatians 6:2, opening clause; King James Version.

What this article is about

After a serious loss, an ordinary day does not disappear. A child needs collecting, a dependent relative needs care, and someone must be told that plans have changed. These tasks can continue while a person still does not know how to bear their own experience. This article examines obligation without demanding an immediate return to the previous pace: what genuinely needs to happen today, what can wait, and how part of a load can be shared while retaining the right to decide for oneself. We compare bodily need in Seneca's letter, the image of a role in Epictetus, and mutual involvement in Galatians. Their differences matter: they are not three versions of one grief technique. Contemporary NHS material provides a separate boundary concerning professional help. Every everyday scene here is hypothetical. The proposed distinction is neither treatment nor a promise of relief; its immediate aim is to name a particular action and available support without testing the correctness of grief.

I. The day that was not cancelled

In an imagined scene, someone comes home after a funeral. A school note lies on the table, a payment reminder remains on the phone, and tomorrow a child needs collecting earlier than usual. Each task seems too small beside what has happened, yet each asks for a response. There is no moral assignment here to prove strength of character. Two kinds of time have collided: the inward time of loss is almost still, while the school bus and the calendar continue moving. Acknowledging that collision helps more than immediately deciding which time is correct. Someone can be deeply affected by a death and still ask who will meet the child tomorrow. That question neither diminishes the person who died nor announces that grief is over.

Everyday speech easily produces a false choice: surrender completely to the experience, or pull yourself together and move on. Both demands leave a person alone with an enormous, undivided task. Between them lies a more concrete question: which actions genuinely need someone to carry them out today, which can wait, and which require an agreement?

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

Answering does not require putting feelings in order first. The answer can come slowly, with pauses, another person's help, and a written reminder of the simplest things. Action begins here by recognising a limit, rather than promising the previous level of performance. Reduced attention and a changed pace do not establish that someone has become less responsible.

This article examines that small interval between experience and obligation. It does not explain the correct way to mourn or set a deadline for returning to ordinary life. Its subject is the organisation of a day in which serious loss and other people's real dependencies exist together. Such a day may have a very modest outcome: a child meets a safe adult, a necessary conversation takes place, one decision is postponed, and no one has to pretend to be calm. That is neither the completion of grief nor a victory over it. It preserves the possibility of living another day without the additional demand to rebuild the meaning of an entire life before taking one small action.

II. Tasks do not all carry the same weight

The word “obligations” often joins together things that cannot reasonably be treated as equivalent. Medication for a dependent relative, an optional email, routine cleaning, and a promise to attend a meeting appear side by side. If they form one indivisible package, every unfinished task looks like a general failure. A fairer distinction begins with consequences: who would be harmed or left without something necessary if this did not happen today? Is another person able to do it? Can the deadline change without a dangerous result? These questions do not supply a universal priority chart. They restore specific content to each item and reveal that maintaining every previous habit may not be necessary now.

It also matters to distinguish doing something yourself from making sure it happens. Sometimes a parent really must collect a child; elsewhere, an advance agreement with a trusted adult will be enough. A meeting might be held personally, postponed, or handed to a colleague with the information they need. Responsibility does not consist exclusively in individual performance. It can take the form of a clear handover: who has agreed to do what, when, and within which limits. Handover has boundaries, because people are not always available, some tasks cannot be reassigned, and not every promise should be delegated. The subject is therefore a verifiable agreement, rather than a comforting belief that help will inevitably appear.

After these distinctions, the day may look poorer than before: a few important tasks, cancelled routine activities, and space for what cannot be calculated in advance. A sparse list does not mean a diminished relationship with life. It shows how much room is actually available. If circumstances leave too many necessities with one person, that is principally a problem in the distribution of work, not a reason to demand a better way of grieving. A relative, colleague, or organisation can contribute through a specific scheduling change as well as through kind

words. Sometimes the most responsible answer is straightforward: I cannot ensure this happens on my own today; let us find another arrangement.

III. Niobe and permission to care for the body

In Letter 63, Seneca addresses Lucilius after the death of a friend. In the second paragraph he recalls that even Niobe, a figure in a story of terrible loss of children, thought about food. For this article, the small separation between the scale of loss and a simple bodily action matters. Eating does not contradict what has happened; needing food does not establish that love has disappeared. Someone can return to a glass of water, warm clothing, or rest without answering the ultimate question of how to live now. Read within that limit, an ordinary action ceases to be a symbolic betrayal. It acquires its own restricted purpose: supporting the body that must remain here.

Seneca, however, says more than this careful observation. He restricts acceptable expressions of sorrow, suspects public tears of attempting to display pain, and contrasts a reasonable attitude with prolonged weeping. Historical mourning deadlines and harsh comparisons appear later in the same letter. None of this should be carried into present support as a medical or moral law. We can take the reminder of bodily need while rejecting a demand to reduce feelings for the sake of a correct appearance. This separation does not rewrite the ancient author retrospectively. It makes clear which thought we are using and which normative part of his position we are declining to adopt.

Paragraph fourteen also matters: Seneca acknowledges his own excessive grief following the death of Serenus. The confident adviser appears as someone whom an event caught without a ready inward order. That admission does not erase the argument, but it changes the reader's distance from it: a philosophical formula and the ability to fulfil it do not automatically coincide. A glass of water should therefore never become a test of Stoic competence. Another person may bring it. Food may remain untouched, and further assistance may be needed. An ordinary action is better understood as available care than as a sign through which observers judge successful grieving or decide whether someone has already mourned for long enough.

IV. Role and action in Epictetus

In chapter XVII of the Enchiridion, Epictetus compares life to a drama whose length and role are determined by someone other than the actor. Within this image, the person's task is to perform the given role well. For continuing obligations, a narrow question can be drawn from it: if conditions have already changed without my consent, which action remains available? The question shifts attention from an impossible restoration of yesterday to a concrete choice within the present. It does not require approval of the event or the declaration that loss is good. This cautious use of the image is nevertheless our editorial bridge, rather than a complete account of the Stoic doctrine of cosmic order.

The danger appears when a role becomes an unchanging instruction. A grieving person is then told: you are a parent, employee, or senior relative, so continue everything as before. Yet even a familiar role requires a new distribution of actions under changed conditions. Fulfilling parental responsibility well may mean asking another adult for assistance rather than silently doing the impossible. An employee's conscientiousness may consist in giving timely notice of a limit instead of concealing mistakes. These modern agreements cannot be deduced directly from the ancient metaphor. We are comparing it with a situation in which a particular role remains, while its previous form of performance needs to change.

Chapter XVI supplies a further boundary. Epictetus permits outward participation in another person's grief while maintaining inward distance from judging the event an evil. This is a specific Stoic discipline of judgement. It is not identical to a contemporary expectation of emotional closeness, and it cannot justify demanding that a bereaved person stop feeling pain for the sake of a more accurate view. For our question, the useful distinction lies elsewhere: action and feeling can proceed at different speeds. Someone may not yet understand their own experience but still inform a school that circumstances have changed. Such a step neither establishes agreement with Epictetus's philosophy nor turns the person in our scene into an exemplary actor.

V. Carrying one's own and helping another

Galatians 6 joins a call to bear one another's burdens with an affirmation of personal responsibility. Verse 2 explicitly connects mutual assistance with the law of Christ; verses 4–5 direct a person towards their own work and burden. These lines should not become a ready classification in which one load must always be transferred and another invariably carried alone. Without an investigation of language and historical context, that division would be overconfident. Here it is enough to recognise the tension between two requirements within a particular Christian exhortation: another person matters, while asking for assistance does not eliminate one's own responsibility.

In an ordinary situation, that tension helps avoid two extremes. The first replaces the person completely: we will decide everything for you because you are incapable at present. The second leaves them unsupported: your grief, your tasks, deal with them yourself. Between these extremes, cooperation can retain the participant's own voice. A helper can prepare food and ask about the useful time, undertake a journey and confirm the address, or draft a message while leaving the decision to send it with the person whose situation it concerns. Even a small expression of agreement matters. Care then avoids taking possession of someone else's entire life or becoming a performance of the helper's indispensability.

The religious source retains its distinctive character. In verses 7–10, assistance and good works belong to an appeal involving God, the Spirit, and the community of faith. A secular agreement about a school journey does not enact that entire teaching merely because it includes concern. The comparison concerns a particular mechanism: another person's load permits participation without the complete disappearance of their own work. Expectations of assistance also need checking, since a family or community may lack resources, and some relationships are unsafe. Words about mutual burdens do not oblige anyone to trust every offer of support, and they do not cancel the right to request a different form of involvement or decline unwanted closeness.

VI. An agreement is smaller than a promise to rescue

Support becomes usable in everyday life when its boundaries are clear. “Let me know if you need anything” can be well meant, but the person must still invent a request, choose a moment, and judge whether they will become a burden. A more definite offer removes some of that additional work: I can collect groceries this evening; I can drive the child on Wednesday; I can look with you at which payments need attention this week. In our imagined scene, these words do not guarantee relief, but they give the conversation an object. The recipient can accept, alter, or decline the offer. Assistance becomes an action with an agreed extent rather than a test of whether a grieving person knows how to ask correctly.

A precise agreement has an ending and can be revised. Someone helping for an evening need not promise permanent availability. The recipient need not display improvement in gratitude for a completed task. It is possible to say: I will take this journey today, and tomorrow we can check in advance what is possible next. Such limitation may appear insufficiently warm, but it protects against a concealed bargain in which care purchases control over another person's behaviour. A practical boundary can make involvement more sustainable when both parties understand it alike. Neither the number of journeys completed nor the clarity of a timetable measures the depth of a relationship or allows families to be ranked by the correctness of their support.

Particular care is needed when assistance involves personal information, money, or decisions on another person's behalf. Delegating one payment does not authorise control of every account; telling an employer something does not permit disclosure of the details of a death. A limited agreement can also name what remains with the person concerned: the final decision, a password, or the choice of message recipients. This is not a compulsory rule of mistrust towards someone close. It is a way to maintain clarity when attention may be occupied elsewhere. The arrangement can change as circumstances change. Previous consent to help does not become permanent consent to intervention, and asking for less involvement does not diminish what has already been done.

VII. When an ordinary appearance misleads

Continuing to work can look more persuasive to observers than a person's account of difficulty. They arrive on time, answer a question, smile at an acquaintance, and others decide that things are normal now. Yet a visible action tells us only that the action occurred. It does not disclose the effort it required or determine the inward experience. The same mistake works in reverse: a cancelled meeting or untouched list cannot measure love for the person who died. Everyday activity and feeling are related, but there is no simple indicator connecting them. Judgement based on a single outward scene can easily become a demand that someone match a conclusion already reached on their behalf.

In work or family communication, a limited statement about consequences may be sufficient. For example: I currently find it harder to keep several assignments in mind; please send changes in writing. Or: I can attend the meeting, but I am not ready to discuss personal circumstances. These sentences do not require disclosure of the whole story or authorise others to judge the appropriateness of a feeling. They move the conversation towards coordinated action. Of course, environments do not always respond respectfully, and organisations may not allow the flexibility needed. A message is therefore no guaranteed route to support. Its more modest purpose is to make a particular limitation known and propose a verifiable adjustment where one is possible.

A consistent outward image of mourning cannot be demanded either. One conversation may be calm and another interrupted by tears; a task possible in the morning may be impossible in the evening. That does not necessarily make the earlier calm insincere. The official NHS material emphasises varied reactions and the absence of a compulsory, smoothly ordered progression through them. We use that source only as a boundary against hasty judgement, not as a way to classify a reader's experience. A practical agreement benefits more from a contingency plan than from demanding an identical condition every day. Participants can establish whom to contact if an activity cannot continue, retaining the right to report a change without also having to defend one's reputation.

VIII. A small action need not bring relief

A simple daily arrangement can easily become a new promise: take small steps, and you will definitely feel better. Yet the connection between an action and inward relief is not established merely because the action looks reasonable. Someone may prepare food and remain in pain. They may fulfil an obligation and then notice greater exhaustion. Here the action is judged principally by its immediate object: food is available, a message is sent, a dependent person receives what they need. If relief appears alongside it, there is no need to deny that. If relief does not appear, the completed task does not become a failed exercise, and the bereaved person need not search for an error in their attitude.

For this reason, it helps to distinguish an objective from a hope in advance. The journey's objective is to meet the child, not to prove a return to life. Cancelling a meeting aims to reduce today's load, not to reach the correct stage of grief. Hope for a more bearable day can remain alongside these objectives without becoming a condition of assessment. The distinction preserves an action's meaning even when the inward outcome is difficult. It also limits this article's claims: no study offered here establishes the therapeutic effectiveness of our way of examining obligations. We propose an original way of framing a question, not a recovery programme with a known sequence and an expected effect for every participant.

The official NHS page mentions small achievable targets among possible ways of supporting oneself. That is contemporary health advice with a different status from a Stoic role or a Christian exhortation. It does not establish that our task list is treatment or a substitute for consultation. The similarity concerns reducing the nearest demand; the difference concerns the sources' purposes and responsibility for evidence. Philosophical reflection helps reveal the meaning and boundary of a choice, while the health material reminds us of the option to seek support. When everyday existence becomes unmanageable, someone does not have to apply our framework successfully before earning the right to speak with an appropriate professional about their circumstances.

IX. Help that philosophy cannot replace

There is a boundary beyond which organising the day is not enough. If necessary daily life is difficult to manage, someone's condition raises serious concern, or their own attempts at support are not helping, discussing the situation with an appropriate health or psychological professional is reasonable. The official NHS material includes seeking professional assistance; its British access routes belong to a particular healthcare system. This article does not choose that route for every reader or establish a diagnosis from a checklist. It retains a fundamental boundary: seeking help does not require proving that one's grief is wrong, exhausting every ordinary strategy, or adopting someone else's philosophy to become an acceptable recipient of care.

People close to someone may also recognise that the support needed exceeds their capacities. Naming that limitation is more honest than promising that presence will solve everything. They can offer assistance in finding an appropriate local resource or accompaniment, if the person agrees. Consultation should not become a means of forcing someone back to a pace convenient for others. Professional help concerns a particular situation and requires its own assessment, which this text does not perform. We provide no treatment instructions, no invitation to diagnose oneself, and no determination of urgency through a literary scene. Questions of immediate danger require appropriate local services and assessment, rather than interpretations of Seneca or Epictetus.

This boundary also matters for the reader's own sense of responsibility. Difficulty keeping a list, having no energy to answer, or needing repeated support does not establish moral inadequacy. An ancient author's words about performing a role well cannot replace an enquiry into the person's actual capacities. If the amount of participation or the form of help needs revision, that does not destroy the meaning of earlier actions. What has already been ensured can be retained, while what proved unmanageable can be released. Philosophy remains a language for distinctions here, not an authority deciding admission to care. Its usefulness ends where it demands that a vulnerable person prove their eligibility to receive support.

X. Another day without a final conclusion

Return to the person with the school note. By the end of our imagined day, they have found no explanation for the death and have not learnt to hold every feeling in order. Yet tomorrow's journey has been arranged, a short message sent, and an email that could wait left unanswered. These actions can be acknowledged without declaring them signs of recovery. Their meaning lies in a particular connection: the child will not be left without an adult, work has received notice, and part of the load was not silently assumed. This outcome has value without a grand account of victory. It requires no completed inward agreement and does not prevent the loss from feeling especially sharp again that evening.

Obligations in grief cannot be completely separated from relationships. Even the shortest list concerns people to whom promises were made, people who depend on us, and people who can be told about a limit. Yet a relationship is not exhausted by maintaining previous productivity. Sometimes its continuation takes the form of an altered promise: I remain involved, but I can currently do less; this matters, so I am telling you in advance that I cannot do it alone. Responsibility stops implying concealed boundlessness. It becomes the capacity to name circumstances and coordinate action without denying what happened. Another person can respond to the actual situation rather than an outward performance of continuity that would require ever greater effort.

Seneca, Epictetus, and Galatians provide no single instruction for such a day. Seneca recalls bodily need within a strict exhortation about sorrow; Epictetus examines action in an assigned role; the Christian text relates mutual involvement to personal work and faith. Their differences remain part of the reading. The contemporary health boundary also has its own purpose and cannot dissolve into spiritual conversation. Between these sources we construct a limited thought: necessary activity can continue without an obligation to stop feeling. Sometimes continuation takes the form of personal action, sometimes an agreement, and sometimes a request for help. None of these forms, by itself, tells us when grief ought to end.

What this means in practice

If this enquiry is manageable now, choose one nearby day. Write down a few tasks that genuinely require a response rather than every possible task. Beside each, ask what would happen if it did not occur today, whether personal performance is necessary, and whether another time or another person is possible. Do not turn the answers into evidence of strength. They are intended to reveal the actual load, not produce an ideal day.

Choose one verifiable agreement. For example, confirm the journey's time and the person who has agreed to undertake it, or explain that a particular conversation needs postponing. Name the limit of assistance: which action is delegated, which decision remains yours, and when the

arrangement will be reconsidered. If no suitable helper is available, record this as a circumstance rather than a personal failure.

After the action, it is enough to ask whether the necessary thing occurred and what needs changing tomorrow. There is no requirement to check whether it produced the correct feeling. The list can be shortened or left aside. If everyday necessities remain unmanageable or someone's condition raises concern, discussion with an appropriate professional does not require successful completion of this exercise first. It is an optional way to reflect on a load, not diagnosis, treatment, or a condition for receiving support.

Key quotation

> *“even Niobe took thought of food”.*

Seneca, Letter 63.2, fragment of the reference to Niobe within a question; Richard M. Gummere's translation.

Connections between traditions

1. **Bodily need and available performance — Seneca, Letter 63.2; Epictetus, Enchiridion XVII.** Seneca recalls Niobe's food, while Epictetus distinguishes assignment of a role from its performance. The shared question is which action remains possible when a condition of life was not chosen. The limited resemblance lies in retaining a concrete object of action within an unalterable event. Here it separates food or a necessary journey from a demand to complete grief first. The difference matters: Seneca's example belongs to a discipline of sorrow, while Epictetus uses an assigned-role metaphor. Neither passage sets a contemporary workload standard for a bereaved person.

2. **Personal work and a shared load — Epictetus XVII; Galatians 6:2, 4–5.** The actor in the first text answers for performance; in the second, bearing another's burden sits alongside attention to one's own work. The shared question is whether responsibility disappears when a helper acts. Comparison permits a distinction between another's involvement and the complete removal of one's own voice. For this topic, that means delegating a specific task under agreed conditions. The boundary is that Epictetus describes no such agreement and Paul connects assistance to the law of Christ. Our movement towards sharing journeys is editorial reasoning, not a common doctrine of both traditions.

3. **Sorrow's appearance and the boundary of judgement — Seneca 63.1–3; Epictetus XVI.** Seneca evaluates the expression of weeping; Epictetus separates outward participation in grief from inward judgement of the event. The shared question concerns what outward behaviour can tell us about experience. Both make the distinction significant but impose different normative restrictions. Here their comparison exposes the danger of judging through

ordinary work performance or visible tears. The precise boundary is that we adopt neither Seneca's suspicion of demonstrative crying nor Epictetus's prescribed inward detachment. Contemporary caution in judgement is a critical conclusion drawn from their differences, not their identical recommendation.

4. **The adviser is limited too — Seneca 63.14; Galatians 6:1.** Seneca acknowledges his own severe sorrow for Serenus; the instruction in Galatians to restore another person includes a reminder to watch oneself. The shared question is whether a helper can stand outside vulnerability. The resemblance concerns the adviser's limited position: stating a rule does not exempt the speaker. Here it supports help with a stated boundary rather than a promise to rescue everything. The difference is that Seneca discusses personal grief, while Paul's verse concerns wrongdoing and temptation, not bereavement. We compare the structure of limited counsel without turning sorrow into wrongdoing.

5. **Care now and the finitude of opportunity — Seneca 63.8–9; Galatians 6:9–10.** Seneca urges appreciation of friends while they live; Paul directs good works towards people while opportunity remains. The shared question is why specific involvement should not be endlessly deferred. Their resemblance concerns action within available time, helping us recognise the significance of today's food or agreed assistance without a complete answer about the future. The boundary is that Seneca addresses friends' mortality, while Paul addresses the religious perspective of good works and the community of faith. Neither passage obliges a grieving person to exceed their capacities or guarantees relief through a completed task.

6. **Unchosen duration and the limit of knowledge — Epictetus XVII; Seneca 63.15–16.** Epictetus's drama can be short or long; Seneca recalls the unknown order of deaths and allows a future meeting as a possibility. The shared question is how to act without controlling life's duration. The resemblance concerns the impossibility of deriving today's choice from a guaranteed future. Here it leaves room for a small obligation without a completed explanation of loss. The difference is that the drama's Author expresses a Stoic position, while Seneca's closing possibility proves no afterlife. This comparison creates no common theology and requires no agreement with the organisation of the world.

Primary sources

1. **Seneca. Moral Letters to Lucilius, Letter 63, §§ 1–16.** The complete letter was read in Richard M. Gummere's English translation. The key quotation is a short fragment of § 2; Seneca's reference to Niobe does not establish a separate reading or quotation of Homer. The volume's title page identifies first printing in 1918 and reprinting in 1925. Letter; title and contents. Historical mourning deadlines and condemnation of tears are not adopted as contemporary standards.

2. **Epictetus. Enchiridion, chapters XVI–XVII.** Both complete chapters were read in Thomas Wentworth Higginson's translation in Project Gutenberg 45109; its title identifies the 1948 edition and 1955 revision. This is neither George Long's nor Elizabeth Carter's translation. Text and title. The role image and inward distance cannot serve as universal instructions for someone in grief.

3. **Galatians, chapter 6, King James Version.** All eighteen verses were read; the adopted passage is 6:1–10, and the epigraph is the opening clause of 6:2. Chapter. The law of Christ, appeal to God, and community of faith remain specific; no study of Greek vocabulary was performed.

4. **NHS. Grief, bereavement and loss.** The official page, reviewed on 14 July 2026, was read; it supplies a boundary concerning support rather than a philosophical tradition or diagnosis. Official page. British access routes are not represented as available everywhere.

Russian quotations are United Wisdom translations of the named English editions; English quotations retain those editions' literal wording. No reading of Latin or Greek originals is claimed. Comparisons and imagined scenes are original editorial reasoning. The sources establish no therapeutic efficacy for the proposed enquiry. Historical translations' status depends on jurisdiction; no worldwide licence or permission for complete copying or raw-source database ingestion is asserted.

Tags

grief, loss, everyday life, obligations, responsibility, support, assistance, care, limits, agreement, handover, family, work, attention, body, food, rest, Seneca, Epictetus, Galatians, Stoicism, Christianity, role, involvement, vulnerability, professional help, hypothetical scenes, philosophy, workload, consent

About the authors

Andrey Zarinsh is the author and founder of United Wisdom. He explores inner transformation, the unity of traditions, intercultural dialogue, and contemporary spiritual discipline. Instagram: @andrey.zarinsh.

Maria Evilkut is a co-author of United Wisdom. Alongside her research, she seeks to test these ideas in practice and observe how principles of unity and mutual understanding work in real life between people and cultures. Instagram: @ilkutki.