

*“Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End”* by Atul Gawande  
WEEK 1

Quote of the week:

**“Human beings fail the way most complex systems fail:  
randomly and gradually.” (p.33)**

Opening prayer:

God of mercy and comfort, look in compassion on us. When we are shaken and troubled with our mortality, sustain us in times of distress with the assurance that you hold us fast even when our confidence in life seems to fail. Preserve us from bitterness and fear, look upon us with favour, and give us peace which surpasses all understanding. Amen.

**Questions for reflection and discussion**

1. This book blends personal narratives and anecdote with facts and statistics drawn from research. From the first part of the book (Introduction, chapters 1-2 / p.1-54), what stories or facts had the most impact on you as a reader?
2. In his introduction, Gawande cites Tolstoy’s story, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. In his distressing experience of dying, what bothered Ivan the most? (p.2)
3. In Gawande’s view, modern medicine has failed us. In what ways? (p.6-10,35-37)
4. Of the following factors contributing to current attitudes towards ageing, death and the elderly, which one do you believe is the most significant? Which one do you resonate with most? Explain.
  - a. The independent self (p.22,46-54)
  - b. More choices for the elderly (p.16-21)
  - c. Longer life, increased prosperity (p.19,32-33)
  - d. Physical deterioration and financial limitation (p.40-48)
  - e. A dominant culture of competence and comparison (p.6-9,28)
  - f. A denial of death (p.6-9)

For Week 2, please have read to the end of chapter 4 (p.109)

Closing prayer (Psalm 139); responsive reading

<sup>1</sup> O Lord, you have searched me and known me.

<sup>2</sup> **You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from far away.**

<sup>3</sup> You search out my path and my lying down,  
and are acquainted with all my ways.

<sup>4</sup> **Even before a word is on my tongue,  
O Lord, you know it completely.**

<sup>5</sup> You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.

<sup>6</sup> **Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is so high that I cannot attain it.**

<sup>7</sup> Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?

<sup>8</sup> **If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.**

<sup>9</sup> If I take the wings of the morning  
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

<sup>10</sup> **even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me fast.**

<sup>11</sup> If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me,  
and the light around me become night',

<sup>12</sup> **even the darkness is not dark to you;  
the night is as bright as the day,  
for darkness is as light to you.**

<sup>13</sup> For it was you who formed my inward parts;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

<sup>14</sup> **I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works;  
that I know very well.**

<sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

<sup>16</sup> **Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.  
In your book were written  
all the days that were formed for me,  
when none of them as yet existed.**

<sup>17</sup> How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!  
How vast is the sum of them!

<sup>18</sup> **I try to count them – they are more than the sand;  
I come to the end – I am still with you.**

Blessing: "May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen." (Philippians 4:7)