

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

WEEK 3 A BETTER LIFE & LETTING GO

(Book Chapters 5-6)

Opening Prayer:

O God, you gave us your son Jesus that we might have abundant life. He healed, bringing people closer to you and to one another. He called for faithful service and surrender to you. It is challenging to reconcile these things with one another, especially in relation to terminal illness and death. Help us to see how health professionals, patients, and caregivers can seek your abundance at the same time that they best serve each other’s needs, and make any needed sacrifices. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ who walks with us in life, in death, and in life beyond death. Amen.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. At his new job in a nursing home Dr. Bill Thomas found the residents “devoid of spirit and energy”¹ and decided more spontaneity, companionship and meaning were needed.² Share stories of your **visits to nursing homes and how you did, or did not, experience abundant life there.**
2. Philosopher Josiah Royce believed, “In ascribing value to the cause and seeing it as worth making sacrifices for we give our lives meaning.”³ Share your thoughts on **seeing meaning in our earthly life especially as it draws to a close.** What connections can be made between Royce’s statement and Jesus’ life?
3. Gawande finds it paradoxical that we leave the decisions on how best to live our final days to the **medical professionals who “concentrate on repair of health, not sustenance of the soul.”**⁴ What are your thoughts on this quote? How might things be done differently?
4. Gawande points out that **medical advances have made it difficult to tell when someone is dying.** Why is that so? What issues does that cause? How might they be resolved?

¹ Atul Gawande, *Being Mortal* (Double Day Canada, 2014), Kindle location 1484

² *Ibid.*, 1680.

³ *Ibid.*, 1691.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1718.

PSALM 63⁵

You are my God, I long for you from early morning.
My whole being desires you like a dry, worn, waterless land.

My soul thirsts for you.

**In the sanctuary let me see how mighty are your works,
Your constant love is better than life itself,
and so I will praise you.**

I will give thanks as long as I live,
I raise my hands in prayer.

**My soul will feast and be filled,
and I will sing and praise you.**

As I lie in bed, I remember you, O God,
I think of you all night long,

**For you are my constant help.
In the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.
I cling to you, your hand keeps me safe. Amen.**

⁵ *Voices United* (Etobicoke: The United Church Publishing House, 1996), pg. 732