

## *Being Mortal* by Atul Gawande



### **End in Mind**

1. As a child, what did you observe about the aging process?  
How was mortality discussed in your family? How do your family's lifespan stories compare to those in the book?
2. What surprising facts did you discover about the physiology of aging? Did Dr. Gawande's descriptions of the body's natural transitions make you more or less determined to try to reverse the aging process?
3. The author writes, "It is not death that the very old tell me they fear. It is what happens short of death..." (55) What do you fear most about the end of life? How do you think your family would react if you told them, "I'm ready"? How do we strike a balance between fear and hope, while still confronting reality?
4. What is your attitude, as you put it into practice, toward old age? Is it something to deny or avoid, or a stage of life to be honored? Do you think most people are in denial about their own aging?
5. Discuss the often-politicized end-of-life questions raised in the closing chapters of BEING MORTAL. If you had to make a choice for a loved one between ICU and hospice, what would you most want to know from them? Susan Block's father said he'd be willing to go through a lot as long as he was able to still "eat chocolate ice cream and watch football on television." What would you be willing to endure and what would you not be willing to endure for the possibility of more time?
6. Doctors, and probably the rest of us, tend to define themselves by their successes, not their failures. Is this true in your life? At work, in your family, at whatever skills you have? Should we define ourselves more by our failures? Do you know people who define themselves by their failures? (Are they fun to be with?) How can doctors, and the rest of us, strike a balance?
7. How was your reading affected by the book's final scene, as Dr. Gawande fulfills his father's wishes? How do tradition and spirituality influence your concept of what it means to be mortal?