



*"...at the end of it all, we need to realize that there is an end to it all."*

The statistics on death are quite impressive -- one out of one people die. Yes, death is one of the great ironies of life. While probing relentlessly for signs of existence in surrounding galaxies, sustainability on Earth continues to elude us. And each funeral we attend lends credence to the oft ignored fact that on our very best day we are still, as St. Peter observed, "...aliens and strangers in this world." (though in my experience some are stranger than others)

Health care systems strain to squeeze maximum minutes from our bodies. Scientists seek remedies for that which assails our health -- sickness, aging, even obesity. Spandex-wrapped gym enthusiasts pound treadmills and hoist barbells in pursuit of cardio excellence and toned abs. But still the end result of this drive for increased quality of life is mere postponement of death.

Folks, at the end of it all, we need to realize that there is an end to it all. This chapter of life called Earth-dwelling will one day be complete and we will flip to the epilogue entitled "eternity".

Recently I was struck by the contrast between two well known individuals who entered the afterlife in radically different ways: Joseph Stalin and Moses.

Stalin's daughter, Svetlana, testified that as he lay dying in bed, racked with horrific hallucinations, he suddenly sat halfway up, clenched his fist toward heaven and fell back into bed dead. It was a poignant ending to a life fueled by hatred of religion.

A much younger Joseph Stalin was once a seminary student preparing for Christian ministry. But a water-shed moment saw him discard the pursuit of God in favor of Nietzsche's doctrine of antitheism. By the time death claimed him, Stalin would be directly responsible for the deaths of 15 million of his own people.

Stalin's polar opposite is the biblical Moses. Scripture records: "Moses was 120 years old when he died, yet his eyesight was clear, and he was as strong as ever. The people of Israel mourned thirty days for Moses...there has never been another prophet like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face..."

Unlike Stalin, Moses passed away in peace and was mourned by millions who loved and admired their leader. He is yet remembered by the remarkable epitaph, "there has never been another prophet like him."

Graduation from Earth is a surety. But graduating with honors is dependent upon the way we invest our days in the classroom of life and which teacher we choose to sit under.

Perhaps the character played by Michael J. Fox summarized it best in the 1989 war drama, *Casualties of War*. After experiencing his troop's kidnapping, gang rape and brutal murder of a young Vietnamese woman, he says, "*Just because we could all be blown away, everybody's acting like we can do anything, and it doesn't matter what we do. But I think it's the other way around. The main thing is the opposite. Because we might die in the next second, maybe we gotta be extra careful what we do. Because maybe it matters more. Maybe it matters more than we even know.*"

I couldn't agree more.