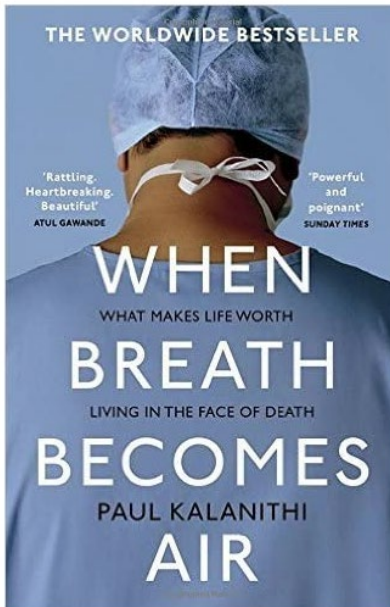


# When Breath Becomes Air

By Paul Kalanithi

(#1 New York Times Bestseller)



Paul Kalanithi was a physician, a neurosurgeon. That in itself is special, but this man was exceptionally special. Many doctors have aspired to be so from a young age. Not so with Dr. Kalanithi. He came from a family of doctors, but he entered college with the intent to be a writer and majored in English literature and biology. In his college years he developed the thought pattern of a philosopher, leading him to frequently question the meaning of life. His foray into biology fit into this paradigm by showing him that neuroscience dictated the rules of brain function, but literature pointed him toward questions about life, questions the brain followed. He concluded that life's meaning was greatly dependent on human relationships, relationships created and valued because the brain said go that way.

In his senior year, as part of a course on neuroscience and ethics, he went on a guided tour of a home for people with severe brain injuries. It proved to be a tipping point in finding his future direction. Because of the time delay in applying to medical school, he had time on his hands. He spent that time at Cambridge University where he received additional graduate degrees. He was not averse to learning, anywhere, anytime.

After finishing medical school at Yale University, he saw his future in neurosurgery. Much of the book tells of what he learned, not just as a young doctor, but as someone who had developed a passion for people and their life

decisions at critical moments. His story is packed with glimpses into his faith and his regard for human relationships.

But there is one overriding feature about this book. It was finished, with much struggle and determination, after he was given the sad news that he had stage IV lung cancer. The diagnosis was made right at the end of his residency, just before he would have embarked on an exciting career, both for himself and the patients whose lives he would embrace. The doctor became the patient in the same hospital in which he had been treating others and immersing himself in their lives.

The noble way he approached the inevitable was inspiring and redemptive. As he was forced to consider his own mortality, he retreated into his love for literature and found an anchor.

My favorite bit of wisdom from this book is, "If science provides no basis for God, then you must conclude that science provides no basis for meaning and, therefore, life itself doesn't have any."

Paul Kalanithi writes in a picturesque manner. The words flow like smooth water over time-washed pebbles in a small stream. You will finish this book in record time because it is hard to put down.

His wife, Lucy, also a physician, wrote the epilogue and described Paul's last weeks, days, and hours. Prepare to have your heartstrings plucked.

Peace,  
Michael Slayter