



Book Club in a Bag

Discussion Questions

“When Breath Becomes Air” by Paul Kalanithi

1. How do you think the years Paul spent, tending to patients and training to be a neurosurgeon, affected the outlook he had on his own illness? When Paul wrote that the question he asked himself was not “why me,” but “why *not* me,” how did that strike you? Could you relate to it?
2. Paul had a strong background in the humanities and read widely throughout his life. Only after getting a Master’s in English Literature did he decide that medicine was the right path for him. Do you think this made him a better doctor or a different kind of doctor? If so, how? How has reading influenced your life?
3. What did you think of Paul and Lucy’s decision to have a child, in the face of his illness? When Lucy asked him if he worried that having a child would make his death more painful, and Paul responded, “Wouldn’t it be great if it did,” how did that strike you?
4. Given that Paul died before the book was finished, what are some of the questions you would have wanted to ask him if he were still here today?
5. Paul was determined to face death with integrity, and through his book, demystify it for people. Do you think he succeeded?
6. In Lucy’s epilogue, she writes that “what happened to Paul was tragic, but he was not a tragedy.” Did you come away feeling the same way?
7. How did this book impact your thoughts about medical care? The patient-physician relationship? End of life care?
8. Is this a book you will continue thinking about, now that you are done? Do you find it having an impact on the way you go about your days?

The above questions were taken from Random House Reader’s Circle. Discussion Questions: When Breath Becomes Air.

<http://www.randomhouse.com/rhpg/rc/2016/02/08/discussion-questions-when-breath-becomes-air>

Book Club in a Bag

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