

Foreword by  
Joni Eareckson Tada

LESSONS  
FROM A  
HOSPITAL  
BED



JOHN PIPER

Lessons from a  
Hospital Bed



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*Lessons from a Hospital Bed*

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## Foreword: Before You Begin . . .

I know hospitals. I wish I didn't, but over the years I've become all too acquainted with their stale corridors and freezing-cold operating rooms. It started back in 1967 when a reckless dive into shallow water snapped my neck, leaving me a quadriplegic. When they rushed me to the hospital on that hot July afternoon, I had no idea I wouldn't be discharged until April 1969.

One morning I was lying on a gurney in the hallway outside the urology clinic. After two hours of waiting and counting ceiling tiles, a lab worker came through the doors to announce I would be "first after lunch break." I moaned. My shoulders were already hurting



from lying flat so long. As the urology staff headed to the cafeteria, my heart sank. More to the point, I nearly choked in a flood of fear and claustrophobia.

Crying was out. There was no one around to wipe my tears. So I decided to comfort my soul with a hymn. In no more than a whisper, I sang a favorite from church choir:

Be still, my soul: the Lord is on thy side.  
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain.  
Leave to thy God to order and provide;  
In every change he faithful will remain.  
Be still, my soul: thy best, thy heavenly  
Friend  
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful  
end!

I was only seventeen years old, or maybe eighteen, but that moment defined how I would engage life in a hospital. My stay would *not* be a jail sentence. Come hell or high water, I determined that this hospital would be, well, a gymnasium for my soul, a proving ground for my faith, and a mission field for God.

*Foreword: Before You Begin . . .*

Sound improbable for a teenager? It is. And looking back, it was. Yet I was enough of a Christ follower to know I *had* to hold onto biblical hope, or else I would go crazy. Yes, I was still wrestling against depression, still struggling with how to actually *live* without the use of my hands or legs—even after I was released from the hospital in 1969. But I would *not* allow myself to sink into despair. That small, resolute act made all the difference, not only then but also years later when I battled stage 3 cancer and chronic pain.

This is why I love the little book you are holding in your hands. You may think its chapters are too short to carry any real weight, but they are perfectly pithy: wisdom delivered through a peashooter. In *Lessons from a Hospital Bed*, John Piper does not have to vet himself as a seasoned navigator of hospitals (much like good ob-gyns never have to give birth to a baby). His credentials come from his Spirit-breathed ability to tell you what's prudent—what the *right* thing to do is with

all the hours you'll log while languishing in your hospital bed.

So please, don't plow through this booklet too quickly. Read its lessons prayerfully and act on their counsel intentionally. Next to your Bible, this little book is your best guide in making certain your hospital stay does genuine good for your soul.

As John has often said, "Don't waste your suffering." And friend, I trust his *Lessons from a Hospital Bed* will help you avoid doing just that during your time in the hospital. It's not a jail—it's a gymnasium. So flip the page and get started. And may God's healing hand of grace rest on you during your illness.

Joni Eareckson Tada  
Joni and Friends International  
Disability Center  
Fall 2015

## The Setting

I wrote this little book in two stages. The heart of it came soon after I was hospitalized for thirty hours due to an unexplained blood clot in my lung. The lessons were fresh from that experience. The rest of it was added about a year later as I reflected more on what God has taught me over the years through sickness and suffering.

I do not write as a veteran sufferer. My life has been too easy for that claim. I assume that most of you are going through more than I ever have. I have stayed overnight in the hospital only three times (not counting when I was born!)—twice relating to prostate cancer, once for the blood clot. Compared to what some of you have been through, that is very minor.

## *The Setting*

People ask me, “How’s your health?” I used to answer, “Fine.” I don’t answer that way anymore. I say, “I feel fine.” There’s a difference. The day before I went for my annual prostate exam, I felt fine. The day after, I was told I had cancer. In other words, I was not fine. So even as I write these words, I do not know if I am fine. For all I know, I have cancer right now. Or perhaps some blood clot is ready to break off and go to my lung.

I mention these things to simply say this: you and I are both very vulnerable right now. You may be in the hospital and I at home. But neither of us knows for sure how well or how sick we are. So instead of saying, “I’m fine,” we say, “I feel fine.” This fits with what the Bible tell us:

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

## *The Setting*

Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”

(James 4:13–15)

*If the Lord wills, we will live.* So we are not as vulnerable as it seems. Our lives are in the mighty hands of God. If he wills, we live. We are immortal until his purpose for us is done. No adversary, no disease can take us out if God wills for us to live. Nothing could be more secure than to be held in the saving hands of God.

But now I have started quoting the Bible. Maybe you didn't expect that. Or maybe you did. If I were you, I would want to know why John Piper quotes the Bible. Where is this writer coming from? So it seems good to me that I should begin by telling you what I believe.

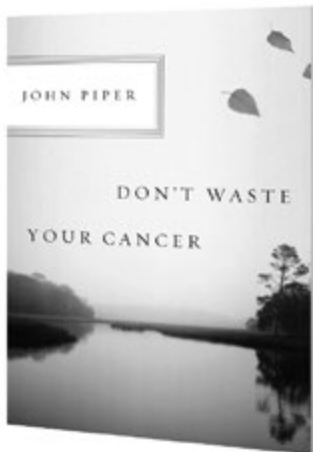
I hope this confession accomplishes two things. One is candor. I want to be completely honest and open about what I believe and where I'm getting my thoughts. The other is encouragement. I am a Christian because I

## *The Setting*

believe these things are true and are the best news in the world, especially in the hospital. In other words, I want to be honest and encouraging.

I know you don't have time or strength to read a long treatise. So I'll tell you where I am coming from in ten short summaries (part 1). If you want, you can just skip these and go straight to part 2, the lessons I learned in the hospital.

# If cancer strikes, how will you respond?



On the eve of his own cancer surgery, John Piper writes about cancer as an opportunity to glorify God. With pastoral sensitivity, compassion, and strength, Piper gently acknowledges that we can indeed waste our cancer when we don't see it as part of God's good plan for us and a hope-filled path to make much of Jesus. This booklet is for anyone whose life has been touched by a life-threatening illness.

ALSO AVAILABLE IN PACKS OF TEN

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Everyone wants to be happy. Our website was born and built for happiness. We want people everywhere to understand and embrace the truth that *God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him*. We've collected more than thirty years of John Piper's speaking and writing, including translations into more than forty languages. We also provide a daily stream of new written, audio, and video resources to help you find truth, purpose, and satisfaction that never end. And it's all available free of charge, thanks to the generosity of people who've been blessed by the ministry.

If you want more resources for true happiness, or if you want to learn more about our work at Desiring God, we invite you to visit us at [www.desiringGod.org](http://www.desiringGod.org).

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## 10 LESSONS FOR YOUR HOSPITAL STAY

Sickness is hard. The combination of physical discomfort, emotional stress, anxious thoughts, and long stretches of boredom can make it difficult to remember—much less *rely on* and *rejoice in*—our good and sovereign God.

Reflecting on ten lessons he learned while recovering in the hospital, John Piper encourages those struggling with illness to fight for faith by focusing on the promises of God, the truth of the gospel, and the reality of eternity.



"Next to your Bible, this little book is your best guide in making certain your hospital stay does genuine good for your soul."

JONI EARECKSON TADA

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**JOHN PIPER** is founder and teacher of [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org) and chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He served for 33 years as pastor at Bethlehem Baptist Church and is author of more than 50 books, including *Desiring God*, *Don't Waste Your Life*, *Don't Waste Your Cancer*, and *God Is the Gospel*.

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