

Pastor Tom Mortenson

Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

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Nabeel Qureshi Remembrance

Selected Scriptures

Prayer: *Father, I just again, I thank you for your goodness, I thank you for your grace, I thank you for the kingdom which is all over, Lord, we just are so pleased to hear about your kingdom work in Honduras. We're going to be looking at your kingdom work throughout the rest of the world in the message this day. And Lord, again, we're going to be looking particularly at one of the servants of your kingdom, Nabeel Qureshi. And Lord, I pray this morning as we again look into this life lived for you that you would again by the presence and the power of your Holy Spirit use his life to glorify yourself and to encourage us, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

When I was a brand new Christian, I had the privilege of listening to a Christian radio station that had a show, I think it was probably from Moody Bible, they had a radio show and it was entitled: "*Stories of Great Christians.*" I don't know if you've ever -- anybody ever heard that, "*Stories of Great Christians*"? Couple. Okay. That's great. These were dramatized stories of

ordinary people like you and me who by the grace of God led extraordinary lives as Christians. And I learned of people like William Borden, the son of the Borden empire, you know, Borden, Elsie the cow, George Mueller, Hudson Taylor, people from another time and another place who let the grace of God flow through their lives in such extraordinary ways that God used them mightily to advance his kingdom. So we need to hear stories of great Christians. The Bible itself is full of these stories from Abraham to Elijah to David and we grow by seeing these lives played out before us. And as we look into scripture and as we look at life, we see that God uses broken vessels, he uses fallen, sinful people who will simply allow God's Spirit to work through them to do amazing things. This morning I want to tell you something about the life of a man who I consider to be an amazing Christian. Now chances are, many of you don't know who Nabeel Qureshi is, but let me give you was brief bio. This is from his Amazon profile because he was an author. It says:

"Dr. Nabeel Qureshi is a New York Times best-selling author and an itinerant speaker with Ravi Zacharias International Ministries. Since completing his medical degree in 2009, he has dedicated his life to spreading the Gospel through teaching, preaching, writing, and debating. Nabeel has lectured to students at over 100 universities, including Columbia, Dartmouth, Cambridge, Johns

Hopkins, Oxford, Cambridge, and the University of Hong Kong. He has participated in 18 public debates around North America, Europe, and Asia. Following the release of his first book, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*, he received the Christian Book Award for the categories of both 'Best New Author' and 'Best Non-Fiction' of 2015. Nabeel focuses on the foundations of the Christian faith, ancient Judaism, early Islam, and the interface of science and religion. He holds an MD from Eastern Virginia Medical School, an MA in Christian Apologetics from Biola University, and an MA in Religion from Duke University. He is currently pursuing a doctorate in New Testament studies at Oxford University where he lives with his wife, Michelle."

Well, many of you know but not all of you know last Saturday after a yearlong battle with stomach cancer, Nabeel Qureshi died. He was 34 years old. His passing was overlooked by most of the major media outlets even though he was the author of a New York Times best-selling book, as I just mentioned, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*. And I discovered Nabeel completely by accident. Although we know that in God's sovereignty there is no such thing as accidents. But one day I was going through You Tube videos 'cause I was looking for some videos that would highlight debates between Muslims and Christians and his name came up. So I just casually started to watch one and I was instantly taken with how

knowledgeable Nabeel was about Islam, how good a debater he was and how kindly and respectfully he treated his adversaries. And so I was hooked. And I learned a great deal from Nabeel, and this morning I want to take you on a journey. I want to take you on a series of videos that Nabeel posted. And I'm going to beg your indulgence because I've never done this. This is going to be a technical masterpiece or disaster, depending on how it goes. We have ten different videos that are going to highlight different parts of Nabeel's life and I'm going to speak about those videos. So we're going to be going back and forth between this screen and my speaking. And I think the reason why I'm doing this is because I want you to know how Nabeel found Christ, I want you to know how he lived Christ and I want you to also see how he died trusting Christ right until the end. The world barely even noticed his passing. I'm absolutely certain that heaven made up for it. So first let me give you an introduction to Nabeel that covers the very beginning of his history and his family. Isaac, you want to start that one right now? (Video playing)

Okay. So from the very beginning you can see that Nabeel was a peaceful observant Muslim who had come from a very devout and loving Muslim family. I think we are conditioned to think that if you are a Muslim then of course if you're not a terrorist, you are at least a terrorist sympathizer. The vast majority of the people

in this country who are Muslim are people who just want the very same things for their families that we all want, and they do desperately need the gospel. *1 Peter* says: *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.* So my first question I want to ask this morning based on what we're going to see from Nabeel is: Are you prepared to share your hope in Christ? We're going to see in the next clip how few Christians have the ability to give an answer for the hope that's within them to people like Nabeel. Here he describes how easily he dealt with well-meaning Christians who tried to share the gospel with him. Okay. (Video playing)

Here's my question: If you had had that kind of a confrontation with Nabeel, would you have been able to give him an answer to any of the points that he brought up? I mean Jesus did say that the Father was greater than he, and Mark's gospel did say that Jesus could do no miracles because of their lack of faith and that he didn't know at that particular time when the end would come. And I could easily see where Nabeel's charm and his knowledge could eat most Christian's lunch. So what would you do if you were in that kind of a situation? Well, if I were Betsy, I know how I would have handled Nabeel's question. I would have given him the answer that I always give to questions about my faith that are

extraordinarily hard or difficult to answer. I would have taken out a piece of paper and a pen, and I would have said, "I don't have the answers to these questions but I know there are answers, and I'm going to find them and get back to you, if that's okay." You see, you don't have to be a rocket scientist to engage people with the claims of the gospel. You just have to be willing to admit your own ignorance and faithful enough to understand that there is no question for which we do not have an answer. I mean our task is not to answer all of the questions immediately but to seek out the answers when we are asked. Now Nabeel went through quite a few believers before he finally met his match. Here's a description of how that happened. (Video playing)

You know, Nabeel says of his friend David, he says, when he shares the gospel with me and begins to tear down my faith, I know he's willing to take a bullet for me and I know he loves me, so I am willing to listen. What does that say about our willingness to enter into the lives of unbelievers? I mean his friend's name was David Woods, and David could have said, you know, this guy's a losing proposition. He's selling, I'm selling, we're both selling, I'm not going to waste my time with him. I just thank God that David understood the importance of earning the right to be heard. So I just want to ask, do you have people that you've set your sights on? Do you have people, folks that you are praying to God

for opportunity to share the gospel with? Do you understand the incredible privilege we have of sharing the good news of the gospel? And you know sometimes that requires this fifty-cent word "intentionality." What that really means is to intentionally pursue someone like David Woods pursued Nabeel. And it may be a housewife praying for and seeking opportunity to share the gospel with someone that she's met at a play date. It could be someone that you bumped into repeatedly at work or school or a guy that you work next to every single day. See, I'm absolutely convinced that if you are prayerfully asking God for these opportunities, he is going to give you them. I thank God that David Woods took the opportunity that God gave him with Nabeel. And here's where the opportunity led. (Video playing)

Let me just give you the context of this verse that he's speaking of that blew his mind. Jesus has just been arrested, he's being quizzed by the high priests and this is what takes place. This is *Mark 14:61-65*, it says: *But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the son of the Blessed One?" "I am" -- that's a God statement from Exodus -- said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man" -- that is also a God statement from Jesus from the book of Daniel -- "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."* And that also is a God

statement from Psalm 1:10 by Jesus. *The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked? "You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" They all condemned him as worthy of death. Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, "Prophecy!" And the guards took him and beat him.* So let's pick up on that verse. (Video playing)

Let me just tell you what the minimal facts defense is. The minimal facts defense is a proof of the gospel of the facts of the gospel using only historical, historically verifiable facts. In other words, you're not going to the Bible, you're looking for outside references to prove the minimal facts that surround it. And for instance, just for Christ's crucifixion, the minimal facts of that is that there are attested to by Josephus who is a Jew, by Tacitus who was a Roman, and by Lucien of Samosata who was a Greek, all in their own language in their own writings, they all attested to the fact that there was a man named Jesus who was crucified. They were not friends of Jesus, they were not believers. So this is what the minimal facts defense does, it goes to outside historical proofs to find the real bare bones facts behind that truth. (video playing)

At this point I just want to ask the question, this is a question

we're going to see Nabeel wrestling with, but I want to ask the question: What price are you willing to pay -- we are people who already understand and accept the gospel but what price are we willing to pay to proclaim the gospel? Jesus says this in *Matthew 10:37*, he says: *"Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Anyone who does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it."* Nabeel understood those words literally because he compared his sacrifice to Christ's. (Video playing)

I don't think Nabeel realized he was being prophetic at that moment. Justin Taylor of *The Gospel Coalition* recounts his description of the pain that he had caused his parents. This is Nabeel's writing. He says: *"After my family learned of my conversion, they have not been the same. My mother has tears in her eyes whenever I see her, a quiver in her voice whenever I hear her, and absolute despair on her face in sleep and while awake. Never have I met a mother more devoted to her children than my mother, and how did I repay her? In her mind, decades' worth of emotional and physical investment ended up with her son espousing views that are completely antithetical to everything she stands for. My father, a loving, gentle, and big-hearted man with every*

ounce of the emotional strength expected of a 24-year veteran of the U.S. Military, broke down for the first time that I had ever seen. To be the cause of the only tears I ever saw fall from his eyes is not easy to live with. To hear him, the man who stood tallest in my life from the day I was born, my archetype of strength, my father, to hear him say that because of me he felt his backbone had been ripped out from behind him, feels like patricide. It was then that I wondered why God had let me live; why had God not just lifted me to himself when I had found the truth? Why did I have to hurt my family so much, and practically eschew the ones who loved me more than anyone else? The answer was sought and found in God's Word. After accepting him, it is my duty to work for him and walk his path. For now, my loss was to be comforted by his words found in *Mark 10:29-30*: *"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "No one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields -- and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life."*

Have you and I ever considered, really considered the cost of claiming Christ? And would you be willing to make the sacrifice that Nabeel made? And what about the friends and the family that you have right now, are you willing to risk them thinking less of

you because of your faith in Christ? I mean have you gotten to the place where you finally realize that it's more important to risk letting go of the ties of friendship that you might be clinging to by telling somebody that without Christ, they are absolutely and forever lost? I mean Nabeel took that risk with the people that he loved the most. Are we willing to take that risk with anybody?

Well, a year ago Nabeel's challenge changed drastically. This is Ravi Zacharias describing what happened. He says: "I tear up as I think of the meal we had a little over a year ago. Nabeel was a man with a daunting appetite. I used to joke in his presence, 'Don't get behind him in a buffet line; there will be nothing left.' He would chuckle. He could make a big meal look like an appetizer. So I noticed that he was just nibbling away at his food. I said, 'Nabeel, are you not going to eat?' He said, 'Uncle'" -- that was his affectionate name for him -- "he said, 'Uncle, I have been having some strange sensations in my stomach.' I asked him how long it had been going on, and he said it had been a few weeks. I urged him to have it checked out. He said he was planning on it. The rest is history. A doctor diagnosed stomach cancer -- probably stage 4. We were all stunned. Within a few months, the writing was on the wall."

Now this next clip that I want to show you is a commencement

address Nabeel went to when Biola College, he was asked to give the commencement address, he gave it last fall, just about a year ago when he knew his prognosis was grave. After all he's a medical doctor, he knew that even in the best of circumstances 4 percent of people diagnosed with this cancer survive. (Video playing)

Well, do you believe what he said? Do you believe that you are a prince or a princess sent here to spread life in this world, that you have the privilege of being Christ's hands and feet in this dying world? And you know, God's not just looking for seminary grads, he's looking for factory workers and teachers and housewives and students and doctors and lawyers, he's looking for anybody and everybody who understands that we have been put on earth to spread life and combat death. And that eternal life does not start when we die, it starts right here, right now, today. And so the question that Nabeel asked, the question I ask: Do you really know what you are here for? Well, as he approached the end, you'll see in this clip that obviously this has been way down the road towards the end, Nabeel asks us to look to the cross as the answer to suffering. (Video playing)

At the very end of his life after the doctors had given up all hope and then placed him on palliative care, his main concern was once again for the gospel. This was the last video that he presented,

and you see his care and his concern is for the way he presented the gospel with his life. (Video playing)

Nabeel died shortly after that video. I have to admit, I felt like I was gut-punched when I heard he died. You know we as a church have been praying for Nabeel for almost a year. We were invested, I mean, he wasn't just a name, he was a very powerful presence and I genuinely thought God was going to do a miracle in his life. I mean because Nabeel had been such a voice for the gospel and because he had left Islam for Christianity, there were many Muslims who looked on his cancer as God's judgment and curse. And I'm not saying that they were gleeful but there were certainly lots of people out there on the Internet who were saying, look what Allah has done. This man abandoned Allah and God has cursed him with cancer. And so I thought well if ever there was a time, if ever there was a place where a miracle would demonstrate whose God was real and whose God was not, this was it. I mean, this is a modern day Elijah challenging the prophets of Baal. And Nabeel himself was convinced that God was going to miraculously preserve his life, and God obviously thought otherwise.

Frank Turek writing in *The Stream* addresses some of the obvious questions that Nabeel's death raised. The first one that he starts off with, he's addressing the Muslims who think that Allah was

cursing Nabeel and he asked them this question, he said: "Why did your God wait until Nabeel had written three best-selling books, made hundreds of hours of videos and helped bring hundreds of Muslims to Christ? Is his timing off? Not only that, Nabeel's work will continue to bring people to Christ, probably in an accelerated manner after his passing. So why didn't God heal Nabeel? What purpose could God have for allowing Nabeel to die?" He goes on to say this: "Some might suggest that people like Nabeel who experience tragedy must be worse sinners than others. Jesus refuted that kind of shallow speculation directly in Luke 13, when he said, 'I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.' Indeed, we are all sinners who will perish and we need to repent before it's too late. Is it because Nabeel didn't have enough 'faith'? People who claim such nonsense don't know Nabeel or correct theology. Nabeel's trust in Christ was deep and unwavering. But the larger point is that faith doesn't guarantee good health and wealth as 'Word of Faith' preachers assert. In fact, their self-serving theology can be refuted by one simple observation: Jesus and the apostles weren't healthy and wealthy. In fact, they suffered and died for their beliefs. Don't tell me they didn't have enough faith! So why didn't God heal Nabeel? What purpose could God have for allowing Nabeel to die? In answering that question, we need to admit that there could be no ultimate purpose to Nabeel's death (or any event) if there is no

purpose to life. But since God does exist, and the purpose of life is to be reconciled with Him through His son, Jesus, then even the tragedies can help achieve that purpose. Perhaps more people will come to know Christ because of Nabeel's death. It's impossible for us to know the extent of that right now, but it's not impossible for God. So we don't know why God didn't heal Nabeel, but we know why we don't know. We're finite and God is infinite. The good news is God's character and power guarantees that he will bring good from evil 'to those who love him and are called according to his purpose.' That may happen later in this life. It certainly will spill over into eternal life. Indeed, God will redeem Nabeel's death for good like he redeemed Nabeel himself. But while Nabeel is now with the Lord, Michelle" -- that's his wife -- "and Ayah" -- that's his daughter -- "remain with us. As Nabeel asked in one of his final videos, please pray for them as well as Nabeel's loving parents" who I believe are still Muslims. "And if you can help Michelle and Ayah financially, would you please do so here?" And "here" is a Go Fund Me campaign that's entitled "Nabeel Qureshi Cancer Fund." I just checked this morning and so far it's raised \$837,000. I think 6700 people contributed and I donated just as a way of saying thank you. Thank you for a life well lived. I mean I consider it a privilege to learn how Nabeel found Christ, how he lived Christ and how he trusted in Christ right up to the very end. Our culture, our culture seeks to emulate movie

stars, rock stars and athletes because that's really, that's as far as the vision of our culture can go. And if you applied that to Nabeel, Nabeel was a Christian rock star. You see, his vision went right through this world and into the next. And he lived not for this world, he lived for the kingdom of God. Would that we would emulate people who put the kingdom of God first and foremost in their lives and who live their lives loving others as Christ loved them. And we would all do well to emulate the life of Nabeel Qureshi.

I want to conclude with Frank Turek's final paragraph. He says this: "While we grieve let us be thankful for Nabeel's eternally significant life. He did more for the kingdom of God in 34 years than ten thousand people do in 80. And the ripples he created -- waves really -- will help carry people into heaven for generations. Blessings to you Brother. See you on the other side." Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for Nabeel. I just thank you for the testimony that he was, for the life that he lived. And Father, if we just walk out of here just having had our emotions tugged, that's not enough, Lord. I just pray that his life would move us to understand what are we doing here? What is the point of this? He got it. This is a man who was going to become a medical doctor. He got it and it turned the whole course of his life around and

he's asking us to get it as well. My prayer is by your Holy Spirit's power we got it as well. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.