

Why Do Some Believers Like Nabeel Qureshi Die of Cancer?

Right now, as many believers mourn the loss of our beloved brother Nabeel Qureshi, his precious wife and daughter, along with other close friends and family members, are experiencing his loss on a much more personal level. That's where our first focus should be, and so I pray that the Lord's comfort and grace be theirs. May our God bring life out of death and redemption out of sickness!

But while we focus our prayers on Nabeel's family first, I'm sure that many are asking the obvious question: Why wasn't he healed? With so many faith-filled men and women of God asking for his healing, why did he die of cancer at such a young age?

For some, this is an abstract question. But for many others, especially those with terminal or incurable illnesses, this is anything but abstract. Dare we ignore it at a time like this?

Here are some obvious questions that are going through many people's minds.

Could it be that God chooses to heal some and not others? If so, how can we pray for healing with any confidence?

If we believe healing is included in the atonement and is always God's desire for His children, then why do we see so few cancer healings today?

And if God simply chose to take Nabeel (and others) home through cancer, then why are serious sicknesses in the Bible associated with sin and the devil? Why are they not looked at as gifts from God? And if our sickness is a gift from God, why do we go to the doctor to try to have this gift removed?

I personally believe that if Nabeel had been among those

coming to Jesus for healing during His earthly ministry, he would have been healed on the spot. Yet Jesus told us that if we believed in Him, we could do the same works He did (John 14:12). Why, then, is there such a massive discrepancy between what He did by the Spirit and what we do by the Spirit?

I understand that Jesus was uniquely accredited by God with signs, wonders and miracles (for example, Acts 2:22). But surely, if His words are true (and they are), we should be seeing many more healings and miracles today.

We know that Paul left Trophimus sick in Miletus (for undisclosed reasons; 2 Tim. 4:20) and that he counseled Timothy to drink a little wine to help with his frequent ailments (1 Tim. 5:23). Yet we also know that God performed all kinds of miracles through Paul, as Acts records (see also 2 Cor. 12:12). Was it hit or miss with his ministry as well, or was healing the expected norm?

In the late 1970s, I became very skeptical of Pentecostal claims of healing and miracles, having been saved myself in a Pentecostal church in 1971 at the age of 16. I even studied the Scriptures with the goal of disproving that healing was for today. (Yes, I really did this.)

But in 1982-1983, after experiencing deep personal repentance and revival, I began to witness sick people being healed by God's power. Yet, in my opinion, they were taking verses out of context as the foundation for their beliefs. How, then, was the Lord healing them?

In order to study this in depth, I changed the subject of my doctoral thesis in ancient Semitic languages, focusing on the Hebrew root for healing (*rapha'*) in the Bible and the ancient Near East. (This was finished in 1985 at New York University.) Then, from 1992-1994, I revisited the subject afresh, going through the Scriptures as comprehensively as I knew how, writing a scholarly volume for Zondervan entitled *Israel's*

Divine Healer (published in 1995). And during this entire time, I was praying for the sick (seeing some significant healings but seeing many more not healed) and reading faith-building books and testimonies.

What was my conclusion after these years of intensive study and prayer? I concluded that healing was God's ideal will for His obedient children, and that rather than praying, "Lord, if it be Your will to heal," we should pray with the expectation that it was His will, sometimes even rebuking the sickness at its root.

Since then, have I seen other precious believers die of cancer? Yes, tragically, including some people very close to me, after years of prayer and fasting for their healing.

Have I prayed for blind eyes that were not opened and deaf ears that were not unstopped? Quite a few times, I'm sorry to say.

Yet I still believe the testimony of Scripture, since my theology is based on the Word rather than on personal experience. And when I have experienced miraculous healing in my own life—including from Hepatitis C, apparently contracted when I was a drug user from 1969-1971 but not manifest until the mid-1990s, after which I was healed—I have been thankful for divine confirmation in the Word.

And, of course, I rejoice in every healing I have witnessed (although I do not have the gift of healing or a healing ministry), and I rejoice in testimonies from around the world of God's gracious healing and delivering power. And there are many!

But whether I see another person healed or not, I will continue to pray for the sick, and I will continue to proclaim that God is our Healer.

As for our brother Nabeel (or, another loved one you lost to

sickness), God alone can tell us why he (or that loved one) was not healed. I would simply ask you to consider the following.

You might believe that the devil is a thief and a murderer, and therefore, in your view, Satan killed our brother. I would just urge you to remember that Nabeel placed his life in God's protective hands, and many prayed for his healing and rebuked the devil. You might want to give your viewpoint further prayer and reflection. Otherwise, how can you be so sure the devil can't get to you?

You might believe that God simply decided to take his son home, purifying his character through cancer. I would just ask you for scriptural examples of our Father doing this. And why, again, is serious sickness virtually always associated with curses, sin, demons or the devil in the Word? Why is sickness, in and of itself, never spoken of as a blessing from the Father? (I don't think Job or Paul's thorn are exceptions to this statement.)

You might believe that somewhere, somehow, sick people must be guilty of secret sin, otherwise they could not be attacked like this. But in holding this position, you are acting like the friends of Job, whom the Lord rebuked at the end of that book. (You're also forgetting verses like John 9:1-3.) And could it be that you find it necessary to come up with this theology as a means of self-protection, since, if a godly leader can get sick, you can get sick too?

You might say, "Obviously, people who die of sickness don't have enough faith." But that would also mean that the many people who prayed for Nabeel, including some used powerfully in healing, lacked faith too. And if you have so much faith, why didn't you successfully pray for his healing?

In the end, we will all die (unless the Lord returns in our lifetimes), and to be absent from these bodies is to be

present with the Lord in a place of unspeakable glory, joy, beauty and perfection—forever! And so, even now, despite the massive hole left in our lives when a loved one dies, death has lost its sting.

As for the answer to the question posed in this article, I cannot say why our brother was not healed.

But I can say that:

- We should continue to pray for the sick with expectation of healing.
- We should continue to ask God to restore the fullness of His healing power to His church, for His glory and our good (we should also pray that He would help us to walk worthy of the manifestation of His miraculous power, lest our flesh get in the way).
- We should give thanks to God in the midst of our sickness and pain, asking Him to work everything out for His purposes and seeking to grow in grace and the character of Jesus in the midst of our affliction.
- We should hate the destructive and disfiguring power of sickness and disease, longing for the day when they will be no more.
- We should minister healing and comfort through both natural and supernatural means, however and whenever possible.
- We should remember that more important than healing the body is saving the soul and changing the heart. And so, our greatest emphasis should be on winning the lost, although salvation and healing often go hand in hand.

Again, may the Lord's gracious comfort be poured out on Nabeel's wife and daughter, along with all of God's people who mourn today. And may we see Him rise in great healing power in the days ahead. May His compassion flow out to a hurting, dying, lost world!