

Book Club: Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus

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[0 : 00] Hello everyone. I'm impressed how many of you have read this book. It's an unusual book, a very challenging book, and a book from which we can learn a great deal.

So what Sandy and I are going to do this morning is I'll say some introductory things for, well I can never quite be sure how long I've gone for, but not for too long.

Then she will present an outline of the narrative for those of you who haven't read it, or those of you who have forgotten that you've read it.

And then I will return and present five themes which struck me looking at the book. I'm sure other themes would have struck other people, but these were five takeaways for me.

We do welcome your comments and questions through the morning. Indeed we may throw out a few questions ourselves from time to time.

[1 : 11] So, the book, the author, the author is a young man, Nabeel Qureshi, born a Muslim, son of Pakistani immigrants.

And the book is, as the title suggests, Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus, a very, very devout young man, very concerned about the truth of Allah, committed to the truth of Allah.

But someone who, through exposure at university to some Christian people, starts to ask questions. And the book is really his autobiography of his search, the challenge, his resistance to Christianity, his desire to disprove Christianity and affirm Islam.

But at the end of the day, his tumultuous coming to Christ. And finally, the cost of that for him.

[2 : 26] Well, we know very little about Islam. Perhaps some of you do. I didn't, I don't. And our perceptions of Islam are typically negative ones.

It's a large religion, we know that. Second only to Christianity in size. And seemingly aggressive in its relations to those who do not follow a very orthodox Islamic position.

So I think, at the back of our minds, we think of Islam at best as a competitor, and at worst as a threat.

And I think especially after a weekend like this weekend, we think of it as a threat, primarily. Then, of course, there are the Syrian and Iraqi refugees fleeing to Europe.

And we hear words like swamping and a burden. What we don't know, because we haven't been told, is that a number of these refugees are religious minorities.

[3 : 40] They actually aren't Muslims. Probably a majority are, but a significant minority are not. And there are a lot of Christians amongst these refugees.

Christians who fled from Iraq, where there has always been a very substantial Christian minority. They fled to Syria because they were permitted to stay in Syria.

But now, of course, Syria is also a place that is too dangerous for them to remain. And so they are moving on through Europe.

I am sure you know that in the Middle East, these religious minorities have, in fact, coexisted for centuries.

Through a whole range of different empires, they found a way of coexisting with each other. It is only in our day that we have this turbulent hostility and the suppression of minorities.

[4 : 45] In fact, one of Saddam Hussein's principal ministers was a Christian. Now, as we think of Islam and terrorism, it's easy to do that.

Because when we think of when Muslims come into the news, our news, it is typically through events like migrants in Europe.

Undocumented, of course, in the strict sense of the word, illegal entrance to Europe. And then the terrorists, ISIS, Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, and so on.

It seems as if there's a very consistent message that we receive. In fact, one of the projects I give my students in one of the courses is to compare news events. Looking at CNN, The Guardian in the UK, and Al Jazeera, which is a newspaper that comes out of the Persian Gulf.

[5 : 57] It now has a North American edition as well. And it's very interesting to see that information we receive has very definite filters on it.

And even difference between news from a left-center newspaper like The Guardian in the UK and from one which is not quite so far left like CNN or Fox News.

Anyway, I don't want to get off on that track. The point I wanted to make here is that Muslims are often on the receiving end of terrorism.

We are shown how Muslims are terrorists, but they are by far the greatest victims of terrorism in a numerical sense.

Much of the fighting in the Middle East is the result of the split between the two major Muslim traditions, Islamic traditions, the Sunni and the Shia groups.

[7 : 11] Iran is, as it were, the champion of the Shias. And Saudi Arabia is the champion of the Sunni Muslims.

And a lot of the conflict and hostility in the Middle East comes out of that particular tension.

Well, I learnt in this book that there are four principal traditions amongst the Sunni. The Sunni comprise some 80% of Muslims.

The Shia, much smaller, 10 to 15%. There are three major theological traditions amongst them as well. That leaves 5 to 10% of Muslims.

And there are a number of minority sects and groups which split off at some point or another, such as the Ismailis that you might be familiar with.

[8 : 13] The Yazidis from the Sinjar region in Iraq have been in the news the last few days as their principal city has just been recaptured, it seems, from IS.

And then the Ahmadiyya sect, which is the sect that Nabil Qureshi's family belongs to. So, Muslims then are far from monolithic.

There's a lot of internal diversity, ethnically and also theologically. Perhaps not as much as within Christianity, but certainly a lot of diversity.

Muslims in the West are different again. And at some point in the book, Nabil tells us about the tremendous gaps between the immigrant generation and their children, the first and second generation.

So, this is not a monolithic population. That's the point I'm kind of laboring here, which is the way I think we typically see it. There's a lot of internal diversity.

[9 : 23] Now, what Nabil offers us is a close-up, intimate view of Islam through his own family's devout religious life.

It is a very devout family he comes from, and he is a very devout member of it. And we learn quite a lot about Islam from his own spiritual observances of it, and then his struggles with it as he seeks deeper into its truth status.

We learn, then, a lot about Muslim beliefs and practices, and we follow an extraordinary drama of conversion.

It is a very dramatic story, this one, of his conversion. Moreover, the book's style is a very accessible style, very easy to read, very personal, very sincere, totally lacking in jargon or other diversions.

The book is also very current. It was published last year. Nabil Qureshi is still a young man. He was born in 1983. So, he's in his 30s, right?

[10 : 55] Yeah, 30s. And he has a ministry now in North America, a ministry of basically telling his story to those who will hear.

Well, I'm going to stop there, and Sandy's turn to present some of the narrative, and then I'll come back with a few takeaway themes.

Okay, I'm going to start, and before he starts the book, he tells us what his purpose is. There's three purposes of the book.

To tear down walls by giving non-Muslim readers an insider's perspective into a Muslim's heart and mind. The mystical beauty of Islam that enchants billions cannot be grasped by merely sharing facts.

But it is my prayer that by entering my world, you will come to understand your Muslim neighbors so you can love him as yourself. The first two sections of the book are especially designed for that purpose.

[12:02] He has nine parts. We're not going to go through one, two, three, four. And at this point, he's pro-Islamic. He's teaching us of the beauty of his childhood and his family.

The second purpose, to equip you with facts and knowledge showing the strength of the case for the gospel in contrast with the case for Islam. History powerfully testifies to the foundational pillars of the gospel, Jesus' death on the cross, his resurrection from the dead, and his claim to be God by doing so.

History challenged my Islamic theology. And the third purpose, to portray the immense inner struggle of Muslims grappling with the gospel, including sacrifices and doubts.

As you will see in the book, it is in the midst of the struggle that God has known to reach people directly through visions and dreams. Then he has a prayer.

Again, this is now the prologue. Page. Please, God Almighty, tell me who you are.

[13:17] I beseech you and only you. Only you can rescue me. At your feet, I lay down everything I have learned. And I give my entire life to you.

Take away what you will. Be of my joy, my friends, my family, or even my life. But let me have the grace of God.

So, growing up Muslim, David has said his family were Pakistani immigrants. His father was in the American Navy studying for an MA.

His mother was university trained. Her family were Muslim missionaries in Indonesia. Nabil and his older sister were American born and felt this tension between not being Pakistani and not being American or being both.

So, he had a lonely childhood, he said. They moved to Scotland. His father was transferred and it was a good time in their life. The Quran is believed to be incorruptible.

[14:24] And this is one of the threads throughout the book that he struggles with, that the Bible is corruptible and the Quran is not. American Muslims have been taught that Muhammad was a peace-loving prophet.

So, that prefaces a lot where we're going in the book. One of the messages of Muhammad, they believe in Jesus.

They know scripture, some scripture. They believe Jesus is a prophet, but God is not a father and he has no son. So, so he knows and they know more about our faith than we know about theirs.

He had a classmate in high school. They moved back to Connecticut. He had a classmate in high school and he challenged her in a conversation. He said, where does Jesus say, I am God?

I'll throw that out to you. Where does Jesus say, I am God? John 10:30. Pardon? John 10:30.

[15:35] And the verse? I and the Father are one. Yeah. Nabil's response to that was yes, but he also says, Jesus prays that his disciples will be one with the Father, just as he is one.

So, so we'll go on and discuss this, but yeah. She invited him to a church play and he invited his father to go with him and it was, if you receive Jesus, you'll go to heaven and if you don't, you'll go to hell pretty much.

but it, it wasn't offensive. I'm, I'm giving you a very brief. So, they were not offended by it. But, they went home and in the car discussed this so you can do whatever you want and accept Jesus and you're in.

And in the Muslim faith, if your good deeds outweigh your sins, you're in. Okay, so there's, there's a works element to the Muslim faith.

Um, they moved, they went back to Scotland to one of these celebrations, the Jamaat. And he was looking for his old friends in Scotland and he, there was a lot of people there.

[16:47] And, he prayed. He said, Allah, help me find my friends. And this was a vision he had where there was ribbons of light and he knew nobody else could see it.

And he followed them and he found his friends. And, he found two of the brothers who then took them to all the rest of the family. So, it was one of those pivotal moments.

You don't forget that in your life. And, um, he was sitting in a, this is still in high, in high school, in a T.O.K. class.

It must be theory of knowledge or something. And he recognized that in Eastern cultures, cultures, and with Islam, with the Islamic faith, Muslims defend their position.

In Western culture, you're taught to look critically at your personal beliefs. So, that was not a part of his background. Um, in Eastern cultures, they established people of high status as authority and they believed them.

[17 : 51] in Western cultures, authority is reason itself. So, he, he now is in a class of theory of knowledge, recognizing, and then looking at his honor-shame culture.

And, he realized that the principle was that you could do something wrong and if you don't get caught, you're okay. And then he gave examples of that. They were quite interesting examples of one person who got caught and it was not good.

And it was, you know, stealing pop from, from the pop machine with a water glass. And, um, and another person doing something worse but making a joke of it and everybody thought it was funny. So, this is an honor-shame issue that, that is not part of the Christian faith. then he went to university and, um, he was an ambassador for Islam and his best friend, David Wood, was an ambassador for Christ.

And it's a lovely apologetic that David Wood gives for years. We're talking years of friendship. Um, one thing that Nabil, um, states is that effective evangelism requires relationship.

[19 : 16] There are very few exceptions to that. Okay, then the other problem, there was a few problems he had. One of the next problems that he threw out to David Wood is the Bible is corrupted, the Quran is not.

So, how do you answer that quickly? They debated for years, of course. they were academics and intellectuals, so David Wood appealed to, to the fact that the Bible was written soon after Christ. Because Nabil was concerned it had been translated several times, changed several times, and David Wood had to say the message has not changed. Um, at one point David says in the book, if I admitted, Nabil, did I say David?

Nabil admits in the book, if David's arguments made sense, I would have to admit my parents and teachers were wrong about the Bible.

And, remember how he goes through this time in his childhood where his parents were totally loving and drilled him on scripture and he memorized large pieces of the Quran and the Bible and was taught to debate this in his culture.

[20 : 50] When I read this part, I thought, wow, we dropped the ball and then I thought, oh well, for the grace of God, we have a survivor in the room here, Susie's with us. What would it take, this is David now, what would it take for you to consider Jesus as Savior?

And he said, if my dad could not defend his position, I might consider Christianity more carefully. And they had sort of a think tank, it wasn't a Bible study, but they had a couple of theologians and they invited people of different faiths and they had people speak and they had debate.

So he invited, David Wood invited Nabil and his father to come and Nabil realized that his father could not defend his position as well as he had expected.

So, further on, Nabil was asked to defend his position, so he was one of the speakers, and two of the theologians encouraged him to go back and pursue the truth.

So he started in his father's library, and his first challenge was to look into the life of Muhammad.

And he recognized that what he had been taught, first of all, that Muhammad was not a peace-loving prophet, but also that the Quran had not been as infallible as he had been trained.

[22 : 34] and so these were bricks in his theology that caused him a great deal of turmoil in his life, and you can imagine why, and then there was a point, there's also, he had to struggle with the Trinity because Muslims have been taught that the Trinity is really bad, that God is one God, and there is no Trinity.

three persons in one, and he had a lot of trouble with that. He was in an organic chem class studying DNA, and the penny dropped.

I'm not going to go into the DNA example, but the penny dropped, and he recognized that this was an example of three in one. And so, why would God forgive love and love me?

What is it that this God would do, that he would die for me? Why me? And then he recognized, he saw in Scripture that because he was my father, and he knew how much his father loved me. he went through this period, and then there was this part in the Quran that was talking about those whom their right hand possesses, and none of them knew what it meant.

[24 : 09] So he looked into that, and of course, he had to accept the fact that Mohammed and the Quran had authorized rape and murder to people that they had captured.

And the men at that time were not prepared to do it, and Mohammed said, go ahead, and it was in the Quran, and he thought, what if it were my mother and my sister?

So, with that final investigation, the keystone of my faith crumbled, the entire structure was ungrounded, poised to collapse at the slightest burden.

And then there were several months that he was very broken, it was a very difficult period for him. And I looked at this, this is not in the book, but I thought, you know, the work of my intellect was done, he said.

I had to rely on God. And I thought, that's true of all of us. Every one of us has a different story. And ultimately, it's an act of God that embraces us.

[25 : 27] So he goes on to the cost. One of the costs was, what if I'm wrong, then I'm doomed to hell. What if I accept this? Christ as Satan?

And I'm wrong. And the other was that he would be humiliating his family. Great pain for his family. And then it would be ostracized.

He could be murdered, in fact. So, David would, in this period, he was saying, what am I to do? And his friend says, Nabil, Nabil, when you were at the Jamaat in Scotland, you asked God to reveal himself.

So he prayed. And again, there was several months, and then he was given the first vision, countless crosses on a black wall in a hotel room.

And he said, God, that doesn't count. And he went through another period of time, and he had his first dream. And there was a snake in the dream, and he phoned his mother, who had a dream book, and he said, what does this mean?

[26 : 44] And all the ducks kind of lined up in a row. And the second dream was a narrow door, and he must accept the invitation in order to be allowed in.

And then the third dream was in a mosque in front of an imen, the beginning of a period of mourning, gradually building into what would be the most painful time of his life.

So, again, when he had the third dream, he phoned his mother, and she had to open her, and he said, what's this symbol mean? I know when we listen to our Egyptian missionary here, he said, for whatever reason, these people are given visions and dreams.

God speaks to them through visions and dreams. So, we're going now through a period of mourning and loss. He looked in the Quran for comfort, and there was none.

So, he turned to the Bible, and he didn't know where to turn in the Bible, so he thought, well, I'll start with the New Testament, and he opened Matthew, and he quickly got to, blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

[28 : 02] And then David Wood had given him a study Bible, so he looked at all the links and spent the day looking through his Bible, and it was a pivotal moment. I skipped, I'll still skip it, anyway.

he then was in a position where he had to tell his family, he was reading, and he thought, okay, if I turn to the Bible, and he did, he prayed that Jesus would reveal himself to me.

I'll read that. I'll read that. I'll read that. He said, I was a crumpled heap on the ground, because he told his parents now that he was a believer.

He said, though Abba did not say much, what he did say has haunted me ever since. The man who stood tallest in my life, my archetype of strength, my father, spoke these words through the palpable pain.

Nabil, this day, I feel as if my backbone has been ripped out from inside me. The words tore through me. And he said, I was killing my father.

[29 : 27] He never stood as tall again. And then, as he went through this pain, he said, why God?

At that moment, the most agonizing moment of my life, something happened that was beyond my theology and imagination, as if God picked up a megaphone and spoke through my conscience.

I heard these words resonate through my very being, because this is not about you. So, I froze with my mouth, the tears, the sobs, the shaking, everything stopped.

I was rooted to the ground. And he said, he was rebooting me. When I was able to move, I felt no sorrow, none whatsoever.

It was as if my prayers of anguish and self-pity had been words uttered in a previous life. So, if we have time, I'm going to let David read the last page.

[30 : 33] Not book. We'll discuss it. Okay? Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. So, that point that Sandy has just made, I think, is something really to reflect on.

The cost. The cost is really very profound in terms of essentially expulsion from the family.

A very, very close family. He had a very had a very deep relationship with his mother and father, which I think would perhaps be less common in the Western context, where we tend to emphasize independence.

So, being separated from that, and of course, in some traditions, in some families, honor killing then is next in line because you have brought shame to the family.

And as Sandy said, this culture, honor and shame is a very big part of culture. culture. So, this was an agonizing step, and I mean, out of that agony has come a really substantial outreach work, ministry.

[32 : 09] And he qualified as a doctor, he went through medical school, but put that aside to go into full-time ministry. ministry. So, he's taking very seriously this issue.

It's not about you. It's not for you to follow your own desires and aspirations. I have a plan for you, and we can, of course, read off Paul's life in that sort of statement.

Well, I've got four takeaways for you. One of them was the cost, but we've covered that now, really. I learnt a lot about Islam from this book, and one of the emphases clearly, reading between the lines, is that Islam is very heavy on repetition and ritual, that its religious observances use a lot of rote, learned prayers, which are repeated a number of times each day.

prayer occasions of a day, each require ceremonial washing, so there's a lot of ritual and repetition. It is secondly an oral tradition, not a written one. The Quran is in Arabic, and that is not accessible to all believers, and it's important that it's in Arabic, because it is regarded as the literal words of Muhammad, that as Sandy said, must not be corrupted, and translation is seen as a form of corruption.

[33 : 53] And this is why the Bible is regarded as corrupt, because it has gone through so many translations. Christians. So, if there is not a dependence upon the word, as Christians would depend upon the word, the dependence instead is on authority.

The authority of the teachers, of the imams, is absolute. You accept what is told to you, you do not question it. The imams present a coherent and seamless message in line with their school of interpretation.

And the precarious nature by which the sayings of Muhammad were actually put together over time.

The ambiguities of Muhammad's life and as Nabil discovers, as he does some historical investigation, Muhammad was not a perfect person as he is presented as being by Islam.

So the precarious nature of the Quran, the ambiguities of Muhammad's life, these are not known to typical Muslims, because there is no tradition of critical inquiry.

You accept what you are given. It is an oral culture. Once Nabil applied a critical approach to the Quran and the life of Muhammad, he, as Sandy said, he found contradictions that could not be reconciled.

[35 : 53] So that was my first takeaway than some of the things I learned, if you like, about Islamic epistemology, about the Islamic theory of knowledge, that it is dependent upon an oral culture that is not to be questioned.

Second takeaway, some of the similarities and differences between Islam and Christianity. we, of course, know next to nothing about Islam, but as Sandy pointed out, Muslims are taught about Jesus and about Christians.

Jesus is an authentic historic character to a Muslim. Nabil's father had a King James Bible in his library.

So, Muslims affirm Jesus, but they distort Jesus. There is no denial of Jesus as a historic figure, but there is a denial of him as the son of God.

What are some of the similarities between Islam and Christianity? Well, monotheism is one, the fact that there are spiritual and material worlds, angels and demons, heaven and hell, that scripture is inspired, that there is a final judgment.

[37 : 29] In fact, we might say that Islam was very heavily influenced by the precedent of Christianity. Christianity. It has drawn a number of Christian themes, Judeo-Christian themes, into its own belief system.

In fact, there is a great deal of agreement with the Old Testament. There are not a lot of problems created by the Old Testament for Muslims.

It's the New Testament that is the problem area. Because they see Jesus in the line of the prophets, in the line of the Old Testament prophets, and to be followed by another and the greatest of the prophets, Muhammad.

So there is the line of revelation through the prophets. Jesus was a great prophet, but Muhammad was the greatest. So they reject the Trinity because God is one, and as Sandy said, they have a tough time working with one and three.

But also because if you accept the Trinity, then you've elevated Jesus to the level of God. And that is something that they cannot do.

[38 : 53] So for them, Jesus did not die on the cross. Instead, he swooned. So they belong to position that you find coming up in some liberal Christian circles from time to time.

The fact that Jesus did not die on the cross, but he swooned later to recover. And this is one of the things that David Wood points out to Nabeel is really very much minority viewing Christianity very much.

And it really doesn't fit the facts. Because Jesus did not die on the cross, there is no substitutionary death for sins.

And so for Muslims, it is works. Your good works, your not so good works, a balance of good works and sin that determine whether you go to heaven or hell.

So Jesus is regarded as a great prophet who knew himself to be no more than that. So that's the case they make. Jesus himself, Sandy, challenge you, they would say Jesus did not claim to be God.

[40 : 19] God. And so here's, you know, you run into an Islamic friend, what's your response to that? It was Paul who is the great culprit for Muslims because, according to the Islamic position, it was Paul who spread the lie that Jesus was God through his theology.

theology. And he developed then an intricate theology around Jesus being positioned as God, a position, Muslims say, that Jesus never claimed for himself.

Mohammed, in contrast to Jesus, is the great and authoritative messenger of Allah, whose teaching cannot be questioned.

To deny that teaching is to be condemned to hell. So this was one of the challenges that Nabil faced. The very act of inquiry about Mohammed, the questioning of Mohammed, was to be on the route to hell.

So the identity of Jesus and Mohammed is a great divide here between the two traditions. So that's the second takeaway.

[41 : 55] The third takeaway is a difference of emphasis among Islamic traditions in the East and the West. East. So the Western influenced Islam, the Islam of North America or Europe, has got a difference of emphasis to that of the East.

In general, Western interpretations see a peace-loving religion. And this is what we hear, of course, when Islamic leaders in Canada are interviewed, is that this terrorism has nothing to do with Islam. Islam is a peace-loving religion. Well, that is an interpretation. The Eastern interpretation, in contrast, acknowledges jihad.

I just want to read a section to you here on that, which I think makes the case quite efficiently. In the West, Muslims are generally taught a very pacific version of Islam.

Western Muslims are taught that Muhammad fought only defensive battles and that violent verses in the Quran refer to specific defensive contexts.

[43 : 22] Jihad is here defined as primarily a peaceful endeavor, an internal struggle against one's baser desires. peace. When asked about their religion, Western Muslims honestly report what they believe, Islam is a religion of peace.

In the East, though, Muslims often have a less docile view of Islam. They are taught that Islam is superior to all other religions and ways of life, and that Allah wishes to see it established throughout the world.

world. They often define jihad as a primarily physical endeavor, a struggle against the enemies of Islam. When asked about their religion, these Muslims will honestly report what they believe.

Islam will dominate the world. So if we define Islam by the beliefs of its adherence, it may or may not be a religion of peace.

But if we define Islam more traditionally as the system of beliefs and practices taught by Muhammad, the answer is less ambiguous. The earliest historical records show that Muhammad launched offensive military campaigns and used violence at times to accomplish his purposes. [44 : 48] He used the term jihad in both spiritual and physical context, but the physical jihad is the one Muhammad strongly emphasizes.

The peaceful practice of Islam hinges on later often Western interpretations of Muhammad's teachings, whereas the more violent variations are deeply rooted in orthodoxy and history. history. Well, it is that Eastern version that we see terrorist groups appropriating, and there's a section, a short section here.

You can see how ISIS has made use of a section such as this. Nabil is talking about a particular battle that occurs in the Quran against Jews.

In the aftermath of the Battle of the Trench, Muhammad captured and beheaded over 500 men and teenage boys from the Jewish tribe of Kureza.

[46 : 10] After the Muslims killed the men, they sold the women and children into slavery and distributed their goods among themselves.

Well, have you heard of that kind of pattern? This is just what happened at Sinjar. So, there is here a reading from a sacred text which is informing this ISIS behavior.

Finally, my final takeaway, because Sandy has already talked about the cost of conversion, the conversion from Islam to Christianity. Much of the book is taken up with this as Nabil struggles as a university student.

As a science student, he has learned critical inquiry and he brings this to bear. from evidence and reason.

But interestingly, that is not enough. He's in constant conversation and disagreement with David Wood, that Sandy mentioned, his best friend, a fellow student and Christian, who comes alongside him.

[47 : 27] and for me, one of the great themes of this book is David's perseverance with his friend, year after year. A discussion that goes on and goes on beyond their bachelor degree into graduate school.

and I want to just read the final piece here, which is Nabil's reflection on this. Unfortunately, he says, I found that many Christians think of evangelism as foisting Christian beliefs on strangers in chance encounters.

The problem with this approach is that the gospel requires a radical life change and not many people are about to listen to strangers telling them to change the way they live.

What do they know about someone else's life? On the other hand, if a true friend shares the exact same message with heartfelt sincerity, speaking to specific circumstances and struggles, then the message is heard loud and clear.

Effective evangelism requires relationships. There are very few exceptions. I think that is a really good theme for us to reflect on.

[49 : 01] But as Sandy said, so you've got the academic thought, the critical inquiry, you've got the friend alongside you, but there is also God's call, God's speaking personally to you.

And in Nabil's case, as we saw, this point of personal conviction came through a vision and through several dreams. And you may want to reflect, as I did, on your own conversion story, and what was the balance of a friend, inquiry, reasoned inquiry, and then God's persuasion, a personal persuasion for you.

Well, that's the end, I think, of our presentation. So we invite any comments. We've got a few minutes left, I think.

Any comments or questions? Yes. Yeah, I've heard about that, I watched this, listen to this Fortress of Faith by Tom Wallace and Kerry. I talked to Nora Johns, she finds the guy a little bit questionable.

Yeah, I can see what you mean. And this other guy, a Muslim and a Christian, they speak on AFR on Saturday, but he mentions House of Mecca, House of Medina.

[50 : 26] And when Muhammad was in the House of Mecca, he was a peaceful Muslim. Then he went House of Medina, that's when it became more militant. Today there are Mecca Muslims and Medina Muslims.

There are Muslims that are peaceful that don't cause any problems at all. And there's ones that do, and there's ones that will say, well, those ones are like that, they're not Muslims. So there's these two houses of Islam, but the Medina Muslims will say, the House of Mecca, that's no more, that was abolished once Medina was started.

So the majority is Sunni Muslims, our janitor is a Sunni Muslim. I showed her in this book, we get nice conversations. I brought out the book, I was talking to her in the staff room about it, and my Roman Catholic friend I showed her the book, and she got mad and I emailed her the book in this learner's exchange, so in a really nice way.

book. Oh, that's wonderful. I found a staff table too. Yes. Well, it's a very readable book, I mean these are short chapters, they're snappy, and they really can catch your attention.

That's a helpful way to thinking about it, Mecca, Medina, the sort of the, those who are looking at global domination, if necessary, through war, and those who are more oriented to peaceful coexistence.

[51 : 46] I read the Koran too, it's half the size of the Bible, written 700 years after, and it took six months, and I was reading it, a piece by the people that I heard, one guy on a Surrey Skype train, he was drunk, and I was on the way to a fortress of faith, he saw me reading a Koran, he thought I was a Muslim, but at it, very prejudiced, and he's looking at anyone that looked at least, and he thought they were, so you can see the bigotry, and his friends, there's a white guy, from Surrey, but his friends are trying to calm him down, so his friends probably had a word with him, but reading me a Koran out in public, oh boy, that's, no way, they didn't have a commentary on it, so it just was, there's a commentary Koran in the Regent College Library, I've noticed.

Very good. You're an expert. Okay, there's a number of hands, I think you were first, me, yeah. Okay, you mentioned, if I got it right, something about the difference between the Western and Eastern, the Western tend to be more sort of liberal in quotation marks, because I can't reinterpret exactly what you said, but the Eastern people must be more authoritarian and more into physical Jehazas and so on, and I'm wondering how this, following along from that, have you got any sense of how, you know, when everything was divided up after World War I, I think it was, back in the East, all these different countries, and then got to then all those different groups, the Sunni and Xi and this one and that one, and all these sort of separations, and how, do you have a good title? I think that's fairly simple for people to read about that time, because that sort of follows along, you know, you mentioned sort of two sections of Western and the Eastern, but beyond that, within the East, there seems to be a number of different groups that emphasize different things. I think I might pass that question over to Sandy. I was happy to say I don't know. We are not experts in this area at all.

I mean, what we've tried to do is to present this book to you, but this book, yeah, I'm sure there is some very good reading you could do, but I don't know what it is.

[54 : 30] Yeah. Yes, Sheila. In answer to this lady's question, it is not a geographic split. It has to do with the succession to Mohammed, who did not have children that succeeded him.

And the prophet, you know, they kind of wanted to go that way. And those that followed his nephew became one group, one major group of Muslims, and those that followed his uncle as successors to him became the other group.

That's where the original split came from. So you would be advised, I can't see who asked the question, to look at the successors of Mohammed and you'll find these two people mentioned and each of them vying for power in a sense, and groups that supported one or the other.

And there's your Sunni. Yeah, but I think the point she was getting at is there's a geography to it. Yes. And that is important that different nations have got a majority of one or the other, and so these religious tensions become national tensions.

And some of them are internal. And internal, indeed. Yes. Yes. Can I just quickly say that the current geography of the East was imposed by the English and French after the First World War and was based on oil and imperial ambitions rather than on the particular nation.

[56 : 01] So they just drew straight lines in the map without thinking about, you know, the Kurds, for example, the split between nations and so forth. Now this was a common model with imperialism that often the boundaries between colonies were actually determined on a desk in Paris or London with no reference.

It was a ruler and a pencil is all that you needed to identify boundaries. That's why there's so many straight line boundaries around colonial states. Yeah, question here?

Yeah. I just want to bring attention to all of you about this, the Trinity dimension, that he used the organic chemistry class to reach this.

Yeah, I have been reading a book written by a physicist on and off. It's really difficult to understand, but he used the quantum theory to also explain.

Because in quantum theory, how you define how you understand the position of a particle has to be through, not mathematically, calculation, but has to be through statistics.

[57 : 15] Because a particle, at the same time, could be in different places. So, but this is not my interest. My interest started from recently, I noticed that there is a university professor, quite a high position in China, did a lecture and wrote a book, and I haven't got to any details yet.

He mentioned about the science in this quantum theory level, proof, the truth of Brutusine. So what I'm saying is, I find it very interesting, is that science can only bring up to certain understanding or personal realization about how to explain the system, including Trinity.

But in the very end, I was all mentioned, it has to do through personal faith. Yeah. And it has to rely on our personal prayer. Good.

Joe has had his hand up for a while. I had, I think perhaps my biggest aha moment in the entire book was on page 52, the beginning of the chapter, where he says, you know, I've been presenting myself as Muslim, and now I'm going to tell you that I'm a Mahdiya Muslim.

And I think, I think that needs to be paid great attention to. I think maybe the best way I can briefly put this forward is, if we were looking at a book called Seeking Jesus, Finding Allah, and if we're written by, say, a Jehovah's Witness, or a Mormon, how would we evaluate that?

[59 : 07] I think that's the best way I can do it. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Okay. Colleen, was this?

Thanks. I don't know what other things have thought of it, but just on a personal note, I found the book absolutely fascinating, as we all probably do, but what I found really interesting was the David, this absolutely inspirational friend who shines through the whole narrative, who sticks with the book.

And interestingly, there's this whole intellectual back and forth among, you know, theologians that David, you know, gets in the cause and the whole thing, and I've learned so much about Christianity in this book.

I'm kind of embarrassed to admit that publicly, but it enlarged my, it enriched my faith by hearing it go up against another religion.

Yes. Yeah. And, you know, of course, in Nabil's case, Christianity wins, right? But I just found it absolutely riveting, because I'd never challenged any of that in my own little life, and I thought it was absolutely astonishing.

Yes. And really, I found this one to take away. Very good. Thank you. Sorry, sorry. Is it relevant?

Thanks for your presentation. I hope you're wonderful. I won't mention her name, but there's an American novelist.

[60 : 33] There's an American novelist. Who addresses, very briefly, an essay. She says, the question for American Christians, and she means, I'm sure, Western Christians, is, is our worldview an identity, or is it an ethic?

She'd be very suspicious of Christianity as an identity. It creates great tribalism, and we're probably the best in the world, and we deserve to have power, we deserve to dominate.

But an ethic is a different thing altogether. It's a received way of life that pays deep attention to the founder of the identity and what he calls for in the life.

Is that part of his drama, our author? Did he, obviously, his identity was so powerfully found in Islam, even within the smaller group that Joe points out, still in that world.

But did he still love the ethic of Islam? Was there something still good there? I'm not sure if he addresses that in the book.

[61 : 49] Well, that's a very interesting observation. I don't think he, he certainly doesn't specifically. My, I do think you're quite right to say that identity, his, his total identity, his total identity was caught up with Islam.

Um, and that is why I think this is such an emotional trauma for him. Because as you say, identity is tribal.

Tribal has got a lot to do about emotional relations. And of course, the break with his family. Wow.

That's awesome, yeah. Yeah, I mean, I, I, I don't think we as Westerners can quite get inside that.

Um, but you know, the fact that his, his mother has to be taken to hospital after he's told her that he's become a Christian. This, this is the extent of, of the trauma.

Just a footnote, you wonder why his, I wonder if his conversation partners ever would draw his attention to the fact that Jesus would say things like, unless you hate your father and mother, you cannot be my disciple.

[63 : 01] He does quote from that. There was a total break with identity he called for. Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's shocking. Yeah, yeah. And, and, and, yeah, truly shocking for him. Truly shocking.

And Lenore, and then Martin. No, I, I'm okay. So, I, I was also interested in the bad book. I, I, reminded, reminded me of when I was a graduate student. I was living in a university residence and one of my neighbours was a Muslim.

And we talked a little bit about, you know, Christianity and Muslim. And I was much less effective than David had. What's interested in the book was I was, I heard, you know, the book explained very clearly the teachings that Muslims have about Christianity.

And in particular, what's, they're taught some things which aren't true, you know, about this sort of corruption of the Bible. They're taught the Bible text is corrupt and mysteriously all Christians know that the Bible is corrupt.

And you continue to adhere to it. Yeah. A belief which really makes no sense. But nevertheless, that's what Muslims, Muslims are told. Yes.

[64 : 08] And so, I mean, I remember, in fact, you know, showing him the New Testament, you know, New Testament law, the textual variants, trying to explain that we have a reliable text. Yes. But not an interrupted text.

But, of course, the background to all that, in fact, Muslims believe they had a, have an incorruptible text in the Quran was something I did not know. Yes. I thought they brought to.

Yes. And this, that's something we really learned from this, isn't it? That, that, wow, it was a very patchy process. But I think that people would have to say that the text of the Quran by normal scholarly standards is pretty good.

It's just not incorrupted. And, yeah. Yeah. One of the things, the thing I left out is that when he was saying, where does Jesus say, I am God, what really impacted him was John 1.1.

In the beginning was the word, and the word is of God, and it was God. Because the Quran, of course, is the word of God, and it's pretty much up there with, with our perception of Jesus as Savior.

[65 : 09] So that, that had a huge impact on him. Yeah, I heard about the Amal. Some of the things they say that the New and Old Testament's corrupted, so the Quran's a revised version.

But I've seen on YouTube a fellow from the United Methodist Church. He's become a Muslim, but he talks about receiving Muhammad spiritually. So he's, through the Christian lens of receiving Christ spiritually, he's addressing Islam.

And in my revised standard version, they say the United Methodist Church, it's liberal, and liberal means more compromised, flexible. If I didn't know what liberal conservative meant. So there are some people that have converted to Islam from a Christian background, and this fellow's an American.

There's another guy, he's got an Australian or English accent, he's also on YouTube. He's now Muslim. I don't know what his background was, but the guy in the States, United Methodist, now he's Muslim. He says, receiving Muhammad spiritually.

That's through the lenses of Christians where he receives Christ spiritually. That's what this guy's doing on YouTube. One of the things that I find truly frightening about Islam, and I do have five Muslim friends, three of whom are Ismailis, which is about the most user-friendly country that I'm used to.

[66 : 29] But going back to the Quran, you are not allowed to translate it. If you are a real Muslim, you are not allowed to read it in translation. I have a Quran in English, they can't read it, because corruption would come into it.

So all of these little kids that are bobbing up and down and learning to repeat the Quran are memorizing it in Arabic. And 17 million Muslims in Indonesia do not speak Arabic.

So they are very much at the mercy of the Imam, who has tremendous power. There is no Pope over the whole thing.

So each Imam is really the ultimate authority in his congregation. And you could equate it, I guess, in a way, with the Christian church in the Middle Ages, where the holy book was in Latin, and most people didn't speak it, and so the priest could interpret that any way he liked, and rebelled against

that kind of instruction.

But it's hard for them to get a handle on the real content of it. They're memorizing bits, and as you pointed out, they're memorizing the prayers, and things like that.

[67 : 48] I think it's frightening, the amount of power that individual imams have. And you know, England has spent quite a while trying to export, deport, whatever, the man who had such power in the East London Mosque.

And that is where he had sometimes come strong in the interpretation of one person, and they are not able to refute that from their own knowledge of the Koran.

Is the man a crime of deport? I can't remember his name, I'm sorry. I'm going to take the lunch.

Thank you. Acknowledging myself. I don't have a question.

I have a three-part comment, I guess, and I appreciate anybody's thought. The first one was the thing that struck me most about the book was the absolute devotion. And I think that that really, you know, it was a lesson to me about, you know, how, when it's up to me and my own personal discipline, you know, I'm a little disappointed in the fact that I, I don't, I'm not as dedicated as I could be.

I guess the other side of that is, is that you come to it through personal, personal choice, which I, is, is that choice that, that God gave us, the freedom of choice.

[69 : 07] And so, it is our own when we take it. I guess the third part is that, I, I almost feel like I'd love to start a study that taught me more about how to defend my faith.

there's no way that I could have refuted these things. And, you know, and so, I guess I'm really curious if anybody comes up with a study guide or wants to start an extra study group or another book I should read, I, I, I think it really struck me that I need to be able to articulate my own faith and have a better knowledge of my own faith.

It's interesting that David Wood had to go out and find out about it. Yeah. Yeah. The Muslim faith in order to talk to his friend. So, go ahead.

Well, I was just going to say in response to your question, I think it was, it came out of, out of kind of a devotion. It said that, what, that David Wood had a very poor childhood, you know, that trailer park, I don't know what he means by that.

But, anyway, but somehow had come to a really vibrant faith. And I think, I, and then at the end of the book where it's talking about that group that got together, he and, and the fellow that was the Buddhist and a couple of others who kind of together searched the scriptures.

[70 : 45] and I think that that, that kind of interest then allows you then to defend. It's, that's where it comes from.

I'm not to say that books and things wouldn't, wouldn't help. But I think the searching, searching the scriptures is, together.

I don't know. I, I was very impressed too with how, how devoted he was. Yeah, I think it's, sorry, my comment to that, my comment to my, take the ledger of chairing speaking up, was I grew up in the Pentecostal tradition.

And so, you went to church Sunday morning and you went to church Sunday night and you went to church on Wednesday and you went to youth group on Friday night. And I, I know that if I hadn't had that personal discipline from my parents telling me that you will adhere, I, I wouldn't have, I wouldn't have learned what I did.

So, I guess at some point I, I need to get, oh there's a minister here and dictate to me. Oh, Sandra, you must. Well, I think that's good about learners exchange.

[71 : 55] Lenore really does have a point now. I don't have a question, well I do have questions but I won't mention them now. I put in a plazaar of catechism. It's just such a, a wonderful thing in our church that we're bringing in more systematic catechism.

About two weeks ago or whenever it was I attended that short weekend one at somebody's home and it's wonderful to learn our, about our faith in a systematic and comprehensible way and I, I found it very helpful.

So, if you get a chance to get into a catechism, of course, go for it. You can like it up, so. Okay.

Joe? Yeah. Speaking as a person of, more than anything else, a literary formation, an education, a training, an outlook, the thing, the other thing that really struck me in this book was the, the comment that the Koran does not have stories.

the only exception that he offered was the story of Joseph. I haven't read the Koran, but that really caught my attention because, to me, the Bible is, before anything else, a story.

I'm going to take last couple, last couple, last minutes, you can keep it brief. Sure. One brief comment about much of this discussion goes back to our novelist friend that was mentioned before as well.

[73 : 32] That was fine comment from an English major. There's a big difference between the study of comparative religion and the competition between two religions seeking, either being sought by one soul or competing for the soul.

They're two very different enterprises. Yeah. And if you are dealing with comparative religion and dealing with religion as it relates to society and culture, then you have a different conversation. And we've mixed that conversation somewhat today, but that's okay. There's much more to relationship between the culture as a whole and the family as part of the culture, relationship of individuals, and so on.

The other general, really, extreme difference between the West and the East, shall we say, is that in the West, Islam is a minority or at least a minority that lives in an enclave, which is often the case. If you go over to Michigan, there are plenty, there are areas where there is a majority of Islam, Muslims, as opposed to in the Middle East, where you're going to get a lot of troubles in Saudi Arabia if they find out you even own a Bible.

[75 : 05] So all of those very things go on. So you have to be careful and look at it with a sense of balance and look at it holistically as well.

Thank you. Thank you. If you don't mind, I'm just going to, I think we have a vociferous, I love it, this discussion here has probably gone on longer than most learners exchange.

I think it just tells how helpful it is. Do you have one quick question? There's one guy, I think maybe you're talking about Anjem Chudery, he's in Britain, he's an outspoken lawyer, I think he's now an imam, but I don't think he's one that's trying to import the word, but he's got very, everybody should be under Sharia law, taken to Muslim courts, like whoa.

Yeah, it's pretty serious. It's not real, he's an unemployed lawyer, and he took law in England. Oh my God. He's on YouTube. Okay, on YouTube, so check it out, there's 20 hours, I just want to take this last off of you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.