



"Believers and nonbelievers
(and the many in between)
will all be helped
by this book."

TIMOTHY
KELLER

JUSTIN BRIERLEY

WHY I'M STILL A CHRISTIAN

AFTER TWO DECADES OF CONVERSATIONS
WITH SKEPTICS AND ATHEISTS—
THE REASON I BELIEVE

FOREWORD BY
ALISTER
MCGRATH

Justin Brierley stands at the top of those who host high-quality podcasts on religious matters. His years of experience dialoguing with believers and nonbelievers alike on countless topics, and doing so intelligently and with congeniality, makes him the perfect person to write this book. This book is a great read, engaging as well as educational, and will encourage one to think deeply about the issues covered. Moreover, by the time readers reach the end of the book, they will feel as though they have become friends with its author. Highly recommended!

MICHAEL LICONA

Professor of New Testament Studies, Houston Christian University

This is a highly readable survey of the reasons for Christian faith, often called “apologetics.” But it is not just an academic exercise. Justin has respectfully engaged many thoughtful atheists and skeptics over the years, which is always a test for a believer. The book is therefore very personal—it explains how his own faith has emerged while working through the challenges he has received. Believers and nonbelievers (and the many in between) will all be helped by this volume.

TIM KELLER

Late pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York City

A wonderfully clear, winsome, and accessible case for Christianity from a man who has hosted many of the world’s most prominent skeptics and atheists. The mixture of storytelling and argument is engaging, and the result is compelling.

ANDREW WILSON

Church leader, author, theologian, and cohost of the *Mere Fidelity* podcast

Atheists tell us that they are champions of reason. If so, how does a man who has heard all the arguments of the world’s

most articulate atheists remain a committed Christian? Unbelievable? No, Justin Brierley is just marvelously well informed (and well mannered). Here he takes us behind the scenes of his popular radio debates between atheists and Christians to show us why his Christian beliefs are stronger than ever. A beautifully written cure for doubts and a spirited defense of Christianity.

FRANK TUREK

Author, speaker, and radio host of *Cross Examined*

Whether you are a believer or a seeker, this book is a must-read. Through the lens of the conversations he has hosted over many years, Brierley invites readers to consider the evidence for the Christian faith. He not only lays out a powerful case for Christianity but does so in an interesting, judicious, and entertaining fashion. Here's my suggestion: get a copy, read it, and then discuss it with a friend.

SEAN MCDOWELL

Associate Professor of Apologetics, Biola University, California, a popular speaker, and author of over fifteen books, including *End the Stalemate*

Gracious, thoughtful conversations about matters of belief and unbelief are very valuable, but, sadly, all too rare in today's culture of memes, sarcasm, and hostile attack and counterattack. Can we do better? Justin Brierley says yes, and has many years of fruitful conversations to prove it. Here, he offers a twofold apologetic: first, he gives reasons why he is indeed still a Christian after all those conversations with atheists; second, he demonstrates that genuine dialogue is both possible and fruitful. Written in an engaging, relaxed style, his book will be useful and encouraging for Christians who are trying to find ways to talk about their faith with

skeptical friends and family, and it will be an interesting and thought-provoking read for skeptics as well.

DR. HOLLY ORDWAY

Author of Tolkien's Faith: A Spiritual Biography

This provocative title draws the reader into Justin Brierley's story. By describing debates and dialogues between well-known critics—such as Richard Dawkins, Bart Ehrman, and Richard Carrier—and well-known Christian apologists, Brierley reflects on accounts from perhaps the best-known religious dialogue program today. Hundreds of archives retell these major skirmishes. As one of his guests and the subject of a chapter in this volume, I can attest firsthand to Justin's well-placed questions, engaging follow-up, and even-handed treatment. So why is Justin still a Christian? Join this highly recommended conversation and enjoy the answers that he provides!

GARY R. HABERMAS

Distinguished Research Professor and Chair, Philosophy Department,
Liberty University, Virginia

Twenty years of dialoguing with skeptics has given Justin Brierley a unique insight into the questions and issues that divide atheists and Christians. In *Why I'm Still a Christian*, Justin helps Christians to understand their atheist friends, treat their questions seriously, and comprehend how to give answers with depth, clarity, and compassion. A deeply thoughtful, incredibly generous book that encourages Christians to take seriously the task of not only answering our skeptical friends but also of truly listening to them.

ANDY BANNISTER

Director of Solas and author of *How to Talk about Jesus without Looking like an Idiot*

JUSTIN BRIERLEY

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Why I'm Still a Christian: After Two Decades of Conversations with Skeptics and Atheists—The Reason I Believe

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Previously published in 2017 as *Unbelievable?: Why, After Ten Years of Talking with Atheists, I'm Still a Christian* by SPCK under ISBN 978-0-281-07798-4. First printing by Tyndale House Publishers in 2025.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN 978-1-4964-6693-8

Printed in the United States of America

31 30 29 28 27 26 25
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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FOREWORD

CHRISTIANITY NEEDS TO RECONNECT with our culture, showing that faith makes sense and is able to engage the deepest questions of human existence. That's what apologetics tries to do. It sets out to engage the problems that many people clearly have with Christianity, present the Christian faith in a faithful yet winsome way, and translate our language of faith into our cultural vernacular. In this important and timely book, Justin Brierley explains how he developed his own approach to apologetics and why this has generated such interest in both Christian and atheist circles.

In my view, the reason why Justin's podcasts and radio shows have had such an impact is that he is willing to engage leading atheists and take their concerns seriously. Some might see this as risky, exposing Christian audiences to alternative viewpoints which they might find threatening. Yet Christians need to realize both that their ideas need defending and that they can be defended! *Why I'm Still a Christian* sets an example to the churches, helping Christians to understand why those outside the church sometimes find their ideas difficult, while at the same time providing an engaging, informed, and persuasive Christian response.

In this book, Justin reflects on his experience in his conversations with both atheists and believers, offering rich fare to his

readers. He covers a wide range of apologetic questions, always ensuring that the atheist or secularist perspective is fairly represented, while making sure his readers know that there are good answers that can be given. This book will be a valuable resource for both those who want to think about their faith and those who want to develop these kinds of conversations themselves. As Justin makes clear, there are lots of problems with an atheist worldview. And unless we have serious yet respectful conversations with atheists, those problems will not be acknowledged. As a former atheist myself, I know how important it is for wavering atheists to find sensible and informed Christians who they can talk to about their growing doubts. I hope many wanting to have these kinds of conversations will find this book helpful and encouraging.

ALISTER McGRATH

Andreas Idreos Professor
of Science and Religion,
University of Oxford

CREATING BETTER CONVERSATIONS

*It is better to debate a question without settling it
than to settle a question without debating it.*

JOSEPH JOUBERT

CONVERSATIONS MATTER.

Sitting in my favorite coffee shop turns out to be an appropriate place to begin writing this book. The conversations that float across the comfy sofas and coffee tables are as diverse as the customers. Students, school mums, musicians, and business professionals are all within earshot. Without trying to eavesdrop, I am soon privy to several conversations, which all drift on to spirituality at some point.

Two retired male friends are talking about the current form of Chelsea Football Club and whether there really is such a thing as a “spirit world.” There are two female students, one of whom is telling the other why she’s frustrated with hearing impressive sermons at her church that don’t seem to change the way people live. There is a faded hippie with long hair and a straggly beard. He’s impressing the young lady opposite him with tales of environmental

protests and music legends he's friends with. When their conversation turns to the power of prayer, he declares, "It doesn't matter which religion you are. When lots of people pray, it releases an energy, which is bound to have an effect."

Despite the frequent surveys telling us that churchgoing is in decline and Christianity is withering away (especially in the UK, where I'm from), the conversations I overheard in the coffee shop show that people are still open to talking about spiritual matters. To borrow a line from Mark Twain, rumors of God's death have been greatly exaggerated.

Indeed, for nearly two decades, I've made a living by creating and facilitating constructive conversations about faith. I've had a ringside seat as believers and nonbelievers alike have debated Christianity, and I've come out the other side more convinced than ever of the truth of Jesus' claims and the power of good conversations.

NEW ATHEISM (AND NOT-SO-GOOD CONVERSATIONS)

While good conversations about faith, belief, and spirituality still take place in our homes and coffee houses, the increasing secularization of Western society has seen a tendency for them to be squeezed out of the public sphere. From the start of the new millennium, a wave of popular books proclaiming that faith is a delusion, religion is bad for people, and science has replaced superstitious thinking led to the coining of the phrase "New Atheism." That movement, unofficially headed by the biologist Richard Dawkins, the late journalist Christopher Hitchens, and public intellectuals from the United States such as Sam Harris and the late Daniel Dennett, has been widely chronicled.

The tone of their books has been so dismissive of religion, it's no surprise that many who read them end up being persuaded

that sensible conversations with people of faith are a nonstarter. As Daniel Dennett frequently remarked, “Religious faith gives people a gold-plated excuse to stop thinking.” The message is that being an intelligent individual and a person of faith are mutually exclusive.

This characterization of religious people is not universal, of course. Part of the joy of my job has been to meet many atheists who are lovely, openhearted people who are delighted to engage in conversation. Nevertheless, the prominence of New Atheism has led to a dramatic dip in the overall quality of conversation in both directions. If we aren’t talking to one another anymore, it means we stand little chance of understanding one another.

The Internet was supposed to change the world for the better. Here was a tool to open up a world of new possibilities and global harmony as it enabled the free flow of ideas on the information superhighway. But the main gateways of today’s Internet, such as Facebook, Google, and YouTube, have worked out that they achieve their best results (i.e., advertising revenue) by feeding people what they want to hear and watch in their news feeds. Rigged algorithms perpetuate a feedback loop—the right-winger only hears from those with the same views as himself; the radical feminist exists in an online world largely sympathetic to her own perspective. The same goes for the average religious or anti-religious web user. It allows people to live in an echo chamber where they can be protected from people who disagree with them.

The increasingly partisan nature of the online world tends to make the problem of having good conversations worse. Visit any Facebook group dedicated to discussing religion, and you’ll find things can get vitriolic quickly. Many conversations become little more than verbal hand grenades lobbed over the barricades of carefully erected worldviews. Atheists attack “faith-heads,” while believers respond in kind by demonizing their opponents. It’s not

helped by the fact that online interactions are devoid of the tone, emotion, and body language from which we take so many cues in our face-to-face conversations. A smiley emoji isn't quite the same as actually smiling at someone.

While this kind of talk has often dominated what we think of as religious debate, it has been my ambition to host a better sort of conversation.

UNBELIEVABLE?

In 2005, after some years working in Christian radio, I was given the opportunity to create a radio show from scratch. The radio station where I worked was great at showcasing Christians talking to Christians about Christian things, which is important and helpful. But I wanted to widen the conversation. With less than 5 percent of the UK attending church on Sundays, what about reaching the vast untapped non-Christian audience too? What if we tried talking to people outside our own bubble?

The final format of the new show was fairly simple. I would sit down with two guests, one a Christian and the other not, to talk about why one believed and the other didn't. And we would title the show *Unbelievable?*. The question mark was essential. Each show would debate a question, with the intention of testing the central claims of Christianity. Could they stand up to scrutiny? What were the alternative views? And what could we learn from inviting people outside the Christian faith into our big conversations?

On a Saturday afternoon in late November 2005 the first episode aired. My very first guests were an Anglican priest and his nonbelieving neighbor. They talked about their different journeys. The neighbor was happy to call himself an atheist but not of the fire-breathing sort. The priest was a model of civility and Christian

witness but wouldn't have described himself as an expert in defending the faith. But that was where we began. Two people describing why they did and didn't believe.

As the show progressed, we began to cover specific issues: Is Scripture reliable? Why would God allow suffering? How do you explain the Trinity? At Christmas we asked if there was evidence for the Virgin Birth and at Easter we debated the evidence for the Resurrection. My book of contacts was filling up with people who were willing to come on the show and discuss these kinds of issues. And it wasn't just atheists and agnostics opposite the Christian guests. Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, and those involved in esoteric New Age practices were also featured on the show.

I began to invite Christians of different theological persuasions for debate. Such discussions were useful for working out where I stood on important issues of Christian doctrine, such as creation and evolution, how to interpret the Bible, and views of heaven and hell. Those topics frequently crop up in conversation with non-Christians, too, so being able to parse the different views that exist was helpful as my own theology took shape.

Because my broadcasting career began just as the New Atheists were emerging as a force to be reckoned with, it was perhaps inevitable that I would end up hosting hundreds of dialogues between Christians and atheists. In 2006, less than a year after the show began, Richard Dawkins's bestselling book *The God Delusion* was published, and his name would crop up regularly on the program over the following years. Eventually I was able to host the man himself.

Hosting open-ended conversations with nonbelievers forced a lot of listeners to get outside the Christian bubble, but many found it to be worth the risk. Bubbles are made for popping, and in our Internet age both believers and non-Christians are only a Google search away from radical skepticism about Christianity. If

Christians want to reach out and share their faith, they need to be prepared for the arguments they will encounter. And when I was behind the mic, they at least got to hear both sides.

The engagement from the radio audience was going well, but I had a feeling that many more people, who couldn't be at their radio set on a Saturday afternoon, would be interested in hearing these discussions if we could make them more widely available. Before long, we began posting the audio of each show on the radio website and as a podcast. And that's when things really took off.

What had at first been a show primarily centered on the UK increasingly acquired an international feel as podcast listeners in the United States, Canada, Australia, and other countries around the world began to identify themselves. As the show gained prominence, so the number of people regularly downloading the show (and exploring its back catalog) grew. At the last count, over four million downloads of the show were being registered each year.

As my knowledge of the Christian and atheist landscape expanded, I was able to identify the key debate battlegrounds, the important arguments within those debates, and the chief proponents of those arguments. I was able to secure some high-profile guests, both believers and nonbelievers.

A number of live events also grew out of the weekly show, including an annual conference in the UK focused on apologetics (defending the claims of the Christian faith). I've also had the opportunity to travel to the United States and Canada to speak at churches and university campuses about the case for faith and to host many onstage dialogues between skeptics and Christians.

After seventeen years at the helm, in 2023 I moved on from hosting *Unbelievable?*. It was a bittersweet goodbye to a show I had created, nurtured, and built up over many years.

Today I continue to work in the field of cultural apologetics, tracing some of the exciting new ways in which the conversation

on faith is developing. My 2023 book *The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God* does just that, telling the story of how New Atheism has largely run out of steam and secular thinkers are seriously considering the claims of Christianity again. I've created an award-winning podcast documentary series of the same name and have been delighted to see hundreds of thousands of listeners across the spectrum of belief joining a new conversation on the value of faith in the modern world.

A TWO-WAY CONVERSATION

While my work has seen some success, I can't claim to have done anything spectacularly original in bringing together two different perspectives for conversation. But in the present climate of argumentative and antagonistic debates (especially online), the sane, measured, and usually friendly discussions I have hosted between intelligent people have struck a chord with many listeners over the past two decades.

In reality, I don't expect a one-hour podcast discussion to change the minds of those who came on the show to defend a particular view. However, the same is not true for those who listen. In my experience, there are many people who are quite open to changing their minds in the course of listening to argumentation and evidence. They are the people my work primarily exists for. Debates are somewhat pointless if they merely reinforce each side's views. But good conversations have a habit of opening up a space for genuine learning. At its best, a well-hosted dialogue causes people to rethink their views and make room for new ways of understanding.

As host, I've heard all kinds of interesting stories as people have written in to describe their reasons for belief and doubt. Often the emails are from Christians telling me how my work has helped

them approach difficult questions and strengthened their faith in the process. Others come from non-Christians who have been turned from hard-boiled skeptics into curious agnostics, or have at least moderated their former view that Christianity is undiluted poppycock. For some, the conversations have been instrumental in a journey to Christian faith: people like Marc, who wrote to tell me that he was as antagonistic an atheist as could be imagined but that my broadcasts, combined with the influence of a loving pastor, had brought him to faith.

However, since a genuine conversation always involves bringing two sides together, the traffic flows in both directions. Many atheists and agnostics have written in to say that they are more convinced by the non-Christian speakers' arguments. I've also received messages from ex-Christians telling me that a conversation confirmed their movement away from faith as they listened.

As someone who is an evangelist at heart, I'm naturally inclined to hope people move towards rather than away from Christianity when they listen, but I've never felt compelled to ensure that the traffic flows in only one direction. It would be impossible to host free-ranging conversations and not expect people to make up their minds in different ways. Indeed, I never cease to be amazed at the opposite conclusions people come to after hearing the same conversation.

Significantly, this is what differentiates my approach from many other worthwhile programs that focus on the reasons for belief. I prefer not to deal in scripted arguments for Christian faith. There's a place for hearing a solely Christian viewpoint, but the cut and thrust of a discussion lets you hear what those arguments look and sound like with someone pushing back. This is the way conversation happens in the real world, and I think there's immense value in hearing a real response from a real person.

I can't control how debates will play out, but as a Christian I'm

happy to do the best job I can in setting up the conversations and hosting them fairly. The rest I leave to listeners to decide, believing that God is at work, even when an atheist does a worryingly good job of putting their points across too! It may be less “safe,” but in an age of fake news, fake tans, and even fake spirituality, people are looking for authentic conversations on faith to help them make their own minds up. If you find yourself in that position, too, then I hope the dialogue contained in the rest of this book will help you to listen, learn, and dive into the conversation yourself.

SHAPED BY THE CONVERSATION

Hosting weekly conversations has provided me with a years-long course in theology and apologetics. On one occasion, rather than host a debate, I invited listeners to send in questions for me to answer. One of the most common was “Have you changed your own mind on any issues?” And more than once, “How can you still remain a Christian having heard so many persuasive arguments from atheists and skeptics?” That’s a fair question, and for an atheist for whom every argument against Christianity looks like a slam dunk, I can imagine that my persisting Christian faith looks like a willful denial of the obvious. But as I’ve said already, two people can listen to the same conversations for years and reach very different conclusions, me included. All these years on, I can honestly say I am more confident in my Christian faith than when I began.

That is not to say my faith has remained unaffected. Numerous beliefs have been refined as I’ve grappled with the sweep of Scripture in all its variety. And yes, there have been a few periods of unsettling doubt for me when presented with cogent critiques of Christianity. There have been one or two sleepless nights along the way as I battled to resolve a question that had been raised, especially when I encountered certain objections for the first time.

Not all of them have been resolved. There are plenty of issues I've filed under "to be decided," "mystery," or simply "I dunno." I don't think doubt will ever evaporate. And why should it? We are rarely granted absolute proof of anything in life. Rather than seeing doubt as the enemy of faith, I've come to see it as an inevitable part of the process of making sense of our beliefs.

Yet there are ultimately only so many objections that can be leveled at Christian faith. After hearing many of them, I've realized they are often simply restatements of classic dilemmas such as the problem of evil, or they revolve around a certain view of Scripture that wasn't essential for a solid Christian faith.

I don't consider myself to be a great theologian or defender of the faith, but being present for so many conversations has gradually given me the tools to sift arguments and determine what seem to be the most significant arguments in support of Christianity. "Iron sharpens iron" is a proverb often used by believers to describe the way they can benefit from mutual spiritual encouragement. But I have found the same applies when believers and nonbelievers dialogue. One's worldview may take a few knocks in the process, but if a conversation is entered in the right frame of mind, a brittle faith can be tempered into an altogether tougher, sharper one in the end.

So for the rest of this book, I'm doing something I don't normally do. Something I'm rather nervous about doing, if I'm honest. I'm taking off my neutral moderator's hat and telling you why, after so many years of hosting conversations with atheists and those of other faiths, I'm still a Christian. Of course, I'd still prefer to tell you in a conversation. But you're there and I'm here, so this will have to do for now. I don't claim to have all the answers, and I'm fully aware there are plenty of comebacks to the arguments I present, but this is where I stand now. After two decades of conversing with atheists and skeptics and hearing the strongest objections to God and faith, this is my case for Christianity.