

Culture Segment

TOPIC: Making a defense among atheists

GUEST: Justin Brierley [BRIAR-lee]

TAPING:

***Studio Interview**

July 8, 2025

1:45 pm

Studio A

AIRDATE:

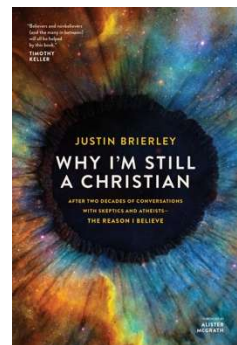
August 21, 2025

SHOW#: 916

Interview Direction:

- To begin, we'll talk about the show Justin hosted for 18 years, *Unbelievable?*—its origin story coming from the rising New Atheism movement, guests and conversations Justin's moderated over the years, responses from the audience, and how the show personally impacted Justin himself.
- We'll close with some practical tips for evangelizing, especially to atheists, and touch on Justin's own faith.

Justin's website: JustinBrierley.com



BOOK (This is a GOAA): *Why I'm Still a Christian: After Two Decades of Conversations with Skeptics and Atheists—The Reason I Believe* (2025).

GUEST BIO – Justin Brierley:



Career:

- Freelance writer, speaker, broadcaster
- 2002-2014 Radio presenter/producer for Premier Christian Radio
- 2005-2023 Host of weekly “Unbelievable?” radio & podcast show and corresponding conference in London
- 2018-2023 Theology & Apologetics Editor for Premier Christian Radio, hosted the Ask NT Wright Anything podcast
- 2014-2018 editor of Premier Christianity magazine, now a contributor
- Co-host of the Re-Enchanting podcast for Seen & Unseen, guest presenter for the Maybe God podcast
- Launched The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God podcast documentary series

Education:

- Studied Politics, Philosophy & Economics at Oxford University

Author:

- *Unbelievable?: Why, After Ten Years of Talking with Atheists, I’m Still a Christian* (2017)
- *The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God* (2023)
- *Why I’m Still a Christian: After Two Decades of Conversations with Skeptics and Atheists—the Reason I Believe* (2025)

Personal Life & Accomplishments:

- Married to Lucy, a church minister in Surrey, with 4 children.
- Involved in youth work and worship leading at church

BOOK: *Why I’m Still a Christian: After Two Decades of Conversations with Skeptics and Atheists—the Reason I Believe* (2025).

WEBSITE: JustinBrierley.com

BACKGROUND:

- **New Atheism and quality conversations**

New Atheism comes from people like Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett, who intellectually disregard faith:

- “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. ... The message is that being an intelligent individual and a person of faith are mutually exclusive” (p. 2-3).
- Not all atheists immediately reject dialogue with believers: “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 (p. 3).
- “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” (p. 3).

- ***Unbelievable?* originated with the goal of preserving healthy discussion:**

- After working in Christian radio, Justin “wanted to widen the conversation” (p. 4) to reach a non-Christian audience and “[force] a lot of listeners to get outside the Christian bubble,” (p. 5) especially in our Internet age. Each radio show presented a question to debate, “with the intention of testing the central claims of Christianity” (p. 4).
- Guests included atheists, agnostics, “Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, and those involved in esoteric New Age practices ... Christians of different theological persuasions” (p. 5).
- Published as a podcast and got over 4 million downloads a year.

- **Audience feedback from *Unbelievable?***

Responses varied from:

- Christians who “strengthened their faith,” “non-Christians who ... turned from hard-boiled skeptics into curious agnostics,” “many atheists and agnostics [who] say they are more convinced by the non-Christian speakers’ arguments,” and “ex-Christians telling me that a conversation confirmed their movement away from faith as they listened.” (p. 7-8).
- **STORY**—Sean McDowell and Jon Steingard (of Hawk Nelson)’s genuine and gracious conversation prompted this YouTube comment: “I am an atheist and just wanted to say how much I appreciate McDowell’s humility and intellectual honesty. I wish all conversations on this important topic could be half as respectful as this one. Much love to all you believers out there.” (p. 177-8)

- ***Unbelievable?*'s impact on Justin himself:**

He's not immune to doubt, but hosting the show only confirmed his faith.

- Hearing different perspectives from Christians helped form his own theological beliefs. (p. 5)
- "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" (p. 9).
- "I don't think doubt will ever evaporate. ... 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" (p. 10).
- "[T]aking off my neutral moderator's hat" (p. 10) to write this book made him a little nervous, since he prefers two-way conversations.
- With the evidence presented to him, he doesn't need to investigate all other keys once he's found the one that fits the lock: "[W]e aren't obliged to investigate exhaustively the truth or falsity of every religion if we find compelling reasons from the outset that Christianity is true" (p. 81).

- **Experiences talking to unbelievers for *Unbelievable?***

- **STORY**—He finally got to interview Richard Dawkins, "the world's best-known atheist evangelist" (p. 153).
 - "Despite his anti-theism, I have a lot of affection for Richard Dawkins" (p. 150). ... "Apart from supplying plenty of material for my programs, the brand of skepticism Dawkins has spearheaded has forced Christians to up their game and think through their faith more critically" (p. 153).
 - Justin asked Dawkins if he really believed morality is derived from evolution alone (p. 149). In his book, Justin excluded the part of the conversation when Dawkins asks if Justin realizes how contemptible he sounds when he brings God into objective morality:
 - "I mean what gets me about you guys is that you're so bloody confident about things you know! I'm saying you don't know—that's the humble position."
 - In response to Dawkins' (and other atheists') claim that "Christians are arrogant for believing that, among all the religious claims that exist, they possess the truth," Justin says the "criticism cuts both ways. Atheists also believe they have the truth." (p. 157)

- **What does it mean to build a "durable faith"? (title of Chapter 9, p. 165)**

- From a construction angle, solid buildings must have a strong foundation and flexibility built into them to withstand severe natural events (p. 167).
 - "Engaging a more durable faith will mean learning where we have permission to *flex* versus when we need to be *rigid* in our doctrinal commitments" (p. 172).

STORIES/QUESTIONS:

- 1) What did your atheist friends think about your book? Did any of them proofread the book before it was published and released to the world?
- 2) Tell us more about mustering up the courage and strength to move forward with writing this book to begin with (**p. 10**). Did you feel a weight that accompanied the task/privilege of sharing the Gospel through these pages, whether explicitly or implicitly?
- 3) What have you learned about talking to people from the past 20 years of moderating and engaging in these kinds of conversations? How do we agree to disagree well?
- 4) In your book, you tell us about your much-awaited conversation with Richard Dawkins, and how he talks about contemptible Christians versus humility. How do we respond to atheists in our lives who react similarly?
- 5) Give us some tips for talking to people of different faiths, or even Christians of other denominations.
- 6) When it comes to deconstruction and reconstruction, you talk about the rigidity and flexibility of solid buildings. How do we discern when to be rigid and when to be flexible?
- 7) How have you maintained your Christian faith amid all the conversations you've had?

END This is a GOAA:

Why I'm Still a Christian: After Two Decades of Conversations with Skeptics and Atheists—The Reason I Believe (2025). Go to Boundless.org, search for 916.

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