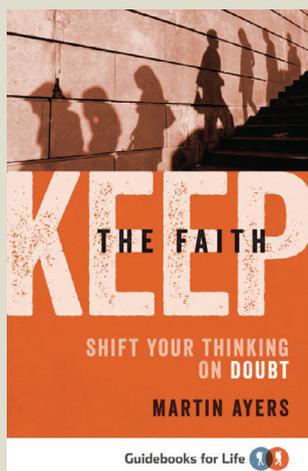


Faith under bombardment



We interview former Oak Hill student Martin Ayers, who is now serving a curacy in Preston, about his new book on doubt and faith



Keep the Faith

Martin Ayers

£5.39 from <http://bit.ly/martinayers>

The Good Book Company, 2012

Martin, you left Oak Hill last year, and your new book *Keep the Faith* has recently hit the shelves. Tell us a bit about it.

Martin: As you'd guess from the title, it's a book written for those who already call themselves Christians and, in short, I'm encouraging them to keep going.

The particular problem I'm addressing is that of intellectual doubts, where the reader might be struggling to keep trusting Jesus Christ because they are no longer sure that the Christian worldview is really true. I think that's much more common under the surface than many people are willing to admit. Lots of Christians have nagging doubts, and sometimes the more we engage non-Christians with the gospel, the more those doubts can grow, especially when we challenge others, but are also challenged by

them. Sometimes we will be told that the reasons we give for our hope are not very good reasons!

There are lots of books available already arguing for the truth of the Christian faith. What makes *Keep the Faith* any different?

I agree that there are some great books out there setting out evidence, addressing objections and offering reasons to believe. Some of them are enormously helpful.

But my aim in *Keep the Faith* is to explore a different and yet biblical angle on our intellectual doubts. I think it's all too common in our churches to treat the realm of intellectual debate as though it's some kind of neutral territory. The Bible doesn't leave room for that, and I think there is scope for the truth to encourage the doubting Christian and

change the way they think about and deal with their doubts.

If a Christian thinks that our minds are neutral, and they are having doubts about the claims of Jesus Christ, then perhaps they'll stop following him so wholeheartedly for a period, and spend their time reading books about ultimate reality written by all kinds of people with different viewpoints and different agendas. Such a doubting Christian, going through what you might call, 'a season of withdrawn investigation', might still be helped by a Christian book containing evidence for faith. But they might be swayed – even persuaded away – by mistakenly thinking there is a neutral playing-field for these arguments. What's more, even if they come back, they remain vulnerable to doubting again when they hear the latest decent-sounding response from non-Christians.

The Bible confronts this rationalistic approach, and challenges us in passages such as Romans 1 to consider how the fall has affected our minds and the minds of everyone around us. Fallen humanity simply does not want the Christian worldview to be true, and intellectual arguments against the Christian faith are tied up all too closely with these sinful desires.

What difference would that make to a Christian who is struggling to believe?

If the doubting Christian takes that on board, it can be hugely encouraging

as they live in the world facing a bombardment of arguments against the truth about Jesus. The intellectual battle has spiritual roots. It's not that unbelievers have looked into things with an open mind, weighed up the evidence for Jesus and found it wanting. The Bible is plain that they are suppressing the truth about God in their unrighteousness, and that affects the way they evaluate the evidence.

Alongside this encouragement, we should also feel the challenge ourselves not to draw back from following Jesus when faced with doubts. The less we fix our eyes on him, the more our hearts may wander to cherish other things. If our doubts really are connected to our desires in this kind of way, then they're only going to get worse as we hold back from following Jesus Christ. Conversely, as Jesus said, it's when we obey him that we come to know the truth.

So what's the story behind you coming to write *Keep the Faith*?

Throughout my Christian life I have certainly had seasons in my own walk with the Lord where my doubts about the claims of Christ have felt stronger and more troubling than at other times.

But I've also experienced the awful tragedy of friends who had once professed faith falling away altogether, citing intellectual doubts as a primary factor in their reasons for giving up on Jesus Christ.

We know to expect this, from the parable of the sower and passages like it. But it's still deeply unsettling for those who remain, who at one time had looked to such friends for encouragement and inspiration to keep going. And of course it's horrendous for the individuals themselves, with their eternal destinies at stake.

At Oak Hill I thoroughly enjoyed the courses on engaging with the contemporary world, including apologetics. And it was very striking for me that these courses always started so intentionally with the presuppositions of the Christian worldview, including the rational effects of the fall.

I found this enormously encouraging in my faith. It made me think about unbelief differently. To the extent that apologetics is about challenging unbelief, it can do this for the believer as well as for the unbeliever. As I was strengthened in my own faith, I was also left wondering, 'Why have I not thought about my intellectual doubts – and those of others – in this biblical way before? How do we pass this on to members of churches up and down the country?'

That's why I've written *Keep the Faith*. I think this biblical wisdom could really help a lot of Christians who are struggling to trust Jesus while surrounded by non-Christians. I'm praying that the Lord will use the book to strengthen and preserve many in their faith, and I'd be grateful if you could join me in that.