

Reaching Out to a Hillsong Leader Who Is Renouncing His Faith

I just read the news that Marty Sampson, a popular Hillsong song writer, is leaving the faith. In his words, "I'm genuinely losing my faith ... and it doesn't bother me." While some critics claim he was never a true believer, accusing Hillsong of being "a prosperity gospel cult," I know nothing about Marty at all. So, I'll take him at his word that he did believe in the past but does so no longer.

What I find most distressing is not him turning from his faith. People fall away all the time, and there are warnings throughout the New Testament about the dangers of apostasy. It is tragic to behold, but not a total surprise.

What is surprising is that Marty seems to feel that "no one" is talking about challenges to the Christian faith. "No one" is discussing difficult intellectual issues. "No one" is engaging the apparent contradictions or interpretative problems in the Bible.

I can only ask (with sadness rather than condemnation), "Marty, what Christian world have you been living in?"

He asks, "How many preachers fall? Many. No one talks about it."

Really?

How many articles have been written in the last few weeks about the apostasy of Joshua Harris, to give the most recent example?

And how many articles have been written—by believers—about sexual and financial scandals involving major Christian

leaders?

“No one talks about it”? Seriously?

He writes, “How many miracles happen. Not many. No one talks about it.”

To repeat my question, “What Christian world was he living in?”

First, there are wonderful books, too many to list here, documenting incredible, contemporary miracles performed in the name of Jesus. (For just a few examples, see [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#); more broadly, see [here](#).)

Second, there are even more books, far too many to list here, dealing with the difficult questions of what to do when you don’t receive your miracle. Yes, plenty of times the expected miracles do not take place. (My search for the words “the problem of suffering” together with Christianity, which address a broader issue of faith, yielded almost 1 million results. For a great starting point, go [here](#).)

Marty writes, “Why is the Bible full of contradictions? No one talks about it.”

Once again, I can’t believe I’m reading these words.

Doesn’t almost every believer, at one point or another, ask about apparent contradictions in the Bible? Don’t all of us, at one time or another, try to find answers to these questions?

Again, not only are there countless scores of books that address these questions in general and in detail, but almost every major study Bible will tackle these questions as well. And what happens when you search for “Bible contradictions” with the word “apologetics”? You find thousands of websites offering different levels of answers to these apparent problems.

Marty writes, "How can God be love yet send 4 billion people to a place, all coz they don't believe? No one talks about it."

As this point, I want to shout, "Of course we talk about it!"

Of course we discuss the question of hell and future punishment. Of course we ask how a good God could condemn His own creation to eternal destruction.

As for the notion that people go to hell "all coz they don't believe," I can only shake my head in amazement. Does Marty have no conception of human sin and rebellion? Do people perish simply because they didn't recite some kind of magic formula?

He writes, "I want genuine truth. Not the 'I just believe it' kind of truth. Science keeps piercing the truth of every religion."

Well, I'm thrilled to hear he wants "genuine truth" as opposed to simply taking things by faith. But I must ask once more, "What Christian world has he been living in?"

Is it just my colleagues, the people who follow my ministry and me who want "genuine truth"? Who are willing to ask the hard questions? Who actually encourage honest seeking? (These are rhetorical questions. The answer is, "Certainly not! There are countless millions who want more than just a simplistic, 'shut off your brain' kind of faith.")

As for science "piercing the truth of every religion," I will simply say this. If Marty and I were standing next to wall of solid, academic Christian books responding to scientific challenges and that wall of books collapsed, we would not survive the avalanche. (Here's a good place to start your study.)

He writes, "All I know is what's true to me right now, and

Christianity just seems to me like another religion at this point.”

And this is even sadder. Has Marty not seen thousands of radically transformed lives through the gospel? Has he not heard the dramatic and moving testimonies of former Muslims and Hindus and others? Does he not see the cross shouting out to him from the depths of God’s loving heart, something not found in any other religion on the planet?

I have no idea if Marty is simply passing through a difficult stretch and will soon be strong in the Lord or if this reflects deeper issues in his spiritual foundations. And, having never studied Hillaire in any depth, I can’t say if these problems are endemic to their spiritual culture.

But what I fear is that Marty’s shocking lack of awareness of a massive array of solid apologetics material is not his alone. In other words, there are probably plenty of other believers who find no outlet for their questions and concerns, leading to apostasy (or, deep, secret doubt) rather than an intellectually sound, vibrant faith. (For the exact opposite approach to burying your questions, see my forthcoming commentary on Job, titled, *Job: The Faith to Challenge God*.)

My prayer is that Marty Sampson would have the integrity of heart to seek the truth earnestly, with humility and passion, and that all others with questions will put those questions on the table.

I’ve done that for the last 47-plus years, being challenged by rabbis from my earliest days as a believer and having done all my academic studies in secular institutions. As a result, I love the Lord with all my heart and with all my mind. He is the God of truth, and His Word is truth.

So, don’t be afraid to ask your honest questions and to follow the truth where it leads. Just don’t do it superficially, and be sure to seek God first and foremost.

And let's pray for Marty's repentance, restoration and more.