

unbelieve

poems on the journey to becoming a heretic



marla taviano

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Publishing books that help you heal, grow, and discover.

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Gorgeous cover art and design by Olivia Taviano

dedication

in grateful memory of
Rachel Held Evans

whose words, love,
brilliance, and humility

changed the entire course
of my life over a decade ago

I owe her a debt
I could never repay

I promise to forever
pay it forward

to you (and me)

if you're asking questions
having doubts

feeling anxious
even scared

I see you
I *am* you

this book is for both of us

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let's do this

RHE

when Rachel died on May 4, 2019, I
cried for days—for her family and friends

for all of us who loved her and depend on
her words and will never get any new ones

two years later, something makes me think
of her and my breath catches in my throat

my chest constricts as I realize all over again
that she's gone and never coming back

in the weeks after she died, I re-read all
of her books and I knew what I had to do

I had to get these thoughts into words on
paper and this book out into the world

I had to

it took me a minute but here she is

humdrum

for 4 years, okay 5, now 6
I try to write a book about

my shifting faith
my unraveling beliefs
my evolving understanding

my blah blah blah blah blah
highlight delete highlight delete

reading my own story
should light me up
not put me to sleep

bless his heart

my dad
wants me to write
a blog post
detailing all of my
theological beliefs
and why
I believe them
so I can put an end
to the confusion
and people can
stop calling me
a heretic

saturated market

on the one hand

you have everyone
and her sister writing books

about their deconstruction
but on the other

I have friends who told me
just yesterday

“Marla, you are the only person
I feel safe talking to about this”

so I guess there’s room
for one more book

long story short

scrapped my wordy drawn-out
deconstruction saga

and swapped it out for
angsty poetry

not happening

a big part of what I've
learned over the past 10

years is how to sit in the
discomfort and tension

of not knowing, of not yet
arriving, of imperfection

but to pretend that I can take
10 years of

agonizing
reading
crying
praying
learning
unlearning
banging

my head against the wall, cram
it into 200 pages and think

my readers will arrive at the
same point I did just like that?

unthinkable

inspo hits like water drops

I used to think
I thought in
Facebook posts
while I was standing
in the shower
but now I realize
they were poems

read between the lines

when everyone
wants you to
explain yourself
poetry
is
an act of
resistance

I was wrong

I spent a whole lot of time for a whole lot of
years making sure I knew it all, got it all right

anything I had to do to avoid that uneasy
and discomfiting feeling of wrongness

I finally opened my mouth and inserted that first
bite of humble pie and yes I gagged and choked

a time or two or six but it started me down
this beautiful path of admitting I was wrong

about not one, two, or six things but a whole hell
of a lot wrong about a whole hell of a lot

couldn't see the poetry for the prose

maybe that should've
been my book title

I know there's not
much new under the sun

but a poem might be
a fresh way to see

an old gem of an idea
in a different light

tip of the iceberg

I'll only scratch the surface of my
glacial-shifting faith in this book

with an occasional deep dive to get
a glimpse of what we're dealing with

but just to warn you—
there's no oxygen down there

you'll have to keep coming up for air

acknowledgments

There's no way in hell I can thank all the people I need/want to thank who have loved and supported me on this journey, so I'm going to keep it short and sweet.

Thank you, Rachel Held Evans. (of course)

Thank you, all the authors I quoted in this book. I owe you so much.

Thank you, all the people ahead of me on the journey who had so much patience with me over the years.

Thank you, all of my friends and neighbors and acquaintances of other faiths who taught me so so much.

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Thank you, Mom and Dad, for raising me to have a kind, generous heart and to love and serve others.

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Thank you, Steph and Daniel, for EVERYTHING. You literally (*literally*) saved my life this past year. I love being your neighbor.

Thank you, offspring, for walking this whole damn thing with me. I love you billions.

Thank you, mama god/Jesus/whoever you are. I feel you with me.

about the author

Marla Taviano is into books, love, justice, globes, anti-racism, blue, gray, rainbows, and poems. She reads and writes for a living, wears her heart on her t-shirts, and is on a mission/quest/journey to live wholefarted (not a typo). She's the author of *unbelieve: poems on the journey to becoming a heretic*, *jaded: a poetic reckoning with white evangelical christian indoctrination*, and other books. She lives in South Carolina with her four freaking awesome kids. Find out more at marlataviano.com.

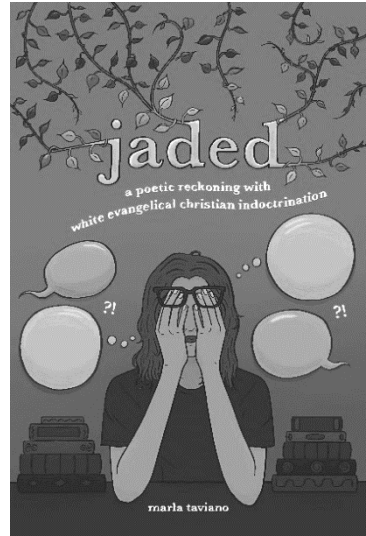
jaded

a poetic reckoning with
white evangelical
christian indoctrination

Marla Taviano

“An unrelenting love letter to the deconstructing exvangelical in all of us, *jaded* kicks your ass in all the ways you never knew you needed.”

— **Stacey Chomiak**, *Still Stace: My Gay Christian Coming-of-Age Story*



For those of us who are picking up pieces of life and faith and figuring out how to heal and move forward, *jaded: a poetic reckoning with white evangelical christian indoctrination* is a collection of poems—short, thoughtful, brave, and spicy—about getting stuff off our chests. Covering topics like evangelical scare tactics, sex and purity, patriarchy, white supremacy, and how the church treats the queer community, these poems say more in fewer words and with zero sugar-coating. With an appendix jam-packed with books to read on your journey, this is a book that will open you up and take you forward. Warning: you might not be able to put it down.

After author Marla Taviano wrote *unbelieve*, a book of poems chronicling her faith deconstruction, her plan was to move on from white evangelical Christianity to bigger, lovelier, more all-embracing thoughts. But she couldn't do it. Why? Because she was still jaded—and knew there was work left to do.

Jaded is this former good Christian girl's offering—a labor of anger and love. We might not need to stay here forever, but we need this now.

“Marla is writing the deconstruction narratives we didn't even know we needed. Cutting out all the extra words we want to use to describe our thoughts, instead Marla goes straight for the guts.”

— **D. L. Mayfield**, author of *Unruly Saint: Dorothy Day's Radical Vision and Its Challenge for our Times*