

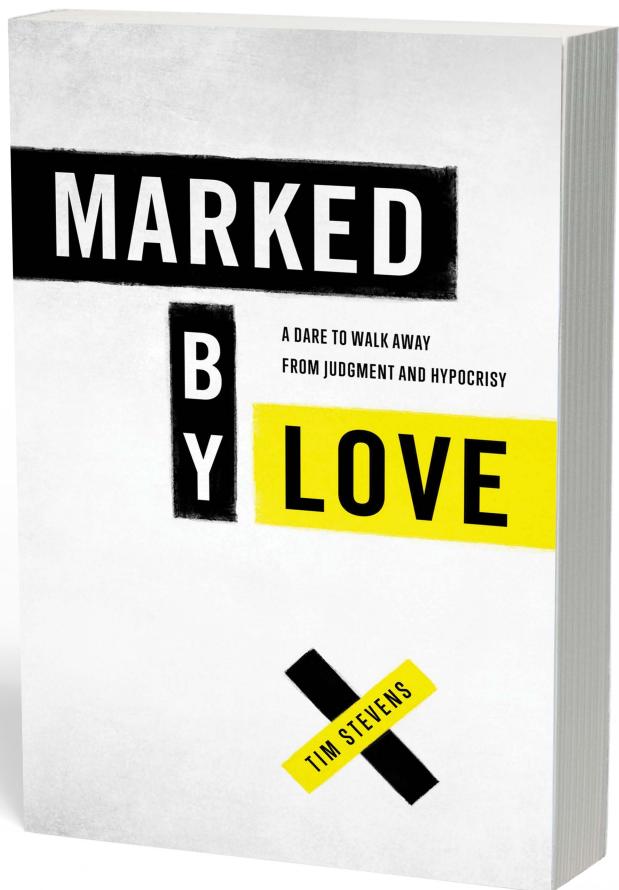
**I DON'T WANT TO  
BE CALLED**

**A CHRISTIAN**



**A MARKED BY LOVE SAMPLE CHAPTER**

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Marked by Love by Tim Stevens***



***God only spoke twice while Jesus was on earth. (We should probably sit up and pay attention.) Both times He said: Jesus is “marked by my love.” No tattoo. No handshake. No team colors or logos or code words. The only thing that marked Jesus Christ and the only thing that would mark His followers is love.***

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## I DON'T WANT TO BE CALLED A CHRISTIAN

It's been a journey trying to figure out what I am.

I'm definitely no longer a fundamentalist. I grew up on a steady diet of sermon recordings by Curtis Hutson, Jerry Falwell, and John R. Rice. They all claimed to hold to the fundamentals of the Bible and preached strongly against “heretics” who taught otherwise. Churches would use the “fundamentalist” label on their street signs, which was a secret signal to the faithful that “we are right” and others are not. Oh, if it were all so black and white.

Then I became an evangelical, which was kind of like a grace-filled version of a conservative Christian. That worked for a while, until the “evangelical” took the place of the “fundamentalist” and became known more for what they stood against than what they stood for. In a poll sponsored by Gallup, David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons found that most people view evangelical Christians as hypocritical, too focused on getting converts, homophobic, sheltered, too political, and judgmental. And why would I want to be branded as such?

In high school I worked as a volunteer for the Ronald Reagan campaign of 1984 and became a vocal member of

the Moral Majority. In those days, it was popular to be conservative, Republican, evangelical, and Christian. In fact, in many ways, those terms were all used interchangeably. Today? I think those terms hurt more than they help.

In some ways, I'm a political conservative. But when I hear the vitriolic, hateful fighting on TV, I want to stay as far away from the "conservative" label as possible.

In other ways, I'm a liberal. But if you believe what you hear in some circles, liberals are all going to hell because they hate families and America and Israel—so I don't want that label either.

I used to be a Baptist. But do I want to put myself in the same category as the folks from Westboro Baptist Church, who picket in front of military funerals, holding signs saying "God hates fags"? I don't think so.

For twenty years I was a pastor at a United Methodist church. The inner-circle joke was that you could say anything about a Methodist and you'd be right. Because some stand for nothing and some stand for everything. It's no longer a label that means anything.

But you know what? I don't want to be called a conservative or a liberal. I don't want to be known as a Baptist or a Methodist. And I don't want to spend any energy explaining to someone whether I'm a Calvinist or an Arminian.

In fact, let me be brutally honest. *Most days I don't even want to be called a Christian.*

I'm dead serious. So much evil has been done through the centuries in the name of Christianity. Maybe we just need to leave the term behind and start over. It has too much baggage. Whether it was the Crusades or Medieval Inquisition of yesteryear, or the pedophile priest scandals of the current era, Christianity has gotten a bad name.

A few years ago, a Christian pastor in Florida publicly

burned a Koran to incite Muslims across the world. A group of Christians from Kansas—the aforementioned Westboro Baptist Church—travels around the country trying to get attention with signs like “Planes Crash, God Laughs” and “Pray for More Dead Soldiers.”

I read in the news about a St. Louis pastor who ate a meal at Applebee’s, and instead of leaving a tip, he wrote on the receipt, “I give God 10%. Why should you get 18%?”<sup>8</sup> Everywhere you turn, you hear of another “Christian” who is giving Jesus a bad name.

Susan K. Smith said it this way:

*I hate it when I hear someone say, “I am a Christian.” Immediately, I recoil, because most times when people say that phrase, it is said with a sense of arrogance and superiority. When I hear those four words, I think not of kindness and love, but of bullying, judgmentalism, exclusivity, unforgiveness, cruelty and hypocrisy.<sup>9</sup>*

Read that again. If you grew up going to church and trying to do the right thing, that should make you very sad.

That’s why I don’t want to be called a Christian. Calling myself a Christian associates me with people with whom I don’t want to be associated. It forces on me a filter I can’t control. As soon as I say I’m a Christian, people put me in a category based on their understanding of what a Christian is—and that understanding is often colored by their personal experiences, good or bad. And many (maybe most?) people believe there is more bad than good. I don’t want to chance that.

The word *Christian* (or *Christianos* in Greek) was originally a Roman term of derision for those who followed Jesus Christ.

They were mocking these early believers with that word. Similarly, in the lead-up to the 2008 election, people who were rabid followers of Hillary Clinton were sometimes called *Clintonistas* and those who held undying loyalty to Barack Obama were labeled *Obamaniacs*. These were not terms of endearment but labels meant to categorize and ridicule. In 2016, those who supported Trump received the label *deplorables*, a term meant to demean but that Trump's followers wore like a badge of honor, sometimes on their T-shirts.

The only known time one of the early disciples used the term *Christian* was when Peter encouraged believers not to be ashamed when they suffer (again lending credibility to the idea that, even within the church the term was mockery). It actually meant something in the first century. It was used specifically to denote a follower of Jesus. They were one and the same.

Not anymore. In today's world, at least in America, the word is either filled with baggage because of the actions or inactions of professing Christians through the ages. Or, it means absolutely nothing. For some, calling yourself a Christian has little to do with Jesus and a great deal to do with culture. Wearing the term is as easy and acceptable as putting on your Calvin Kleins or grabbing your iPhone.

I once typed "Christians are" into a Google search field and these were the first five search results:

- Christians are annoying.
- Christians are hate-filled.
- Christians are hypocritical.
- Christians are delusional.
- Christians are narrow-minded.

In Bing, you'll see the words *stupid* and *crazy* in the top results.

Don't get me wrong: I don't have a problem with Jesus. My problem is with Christianity. I think too many people have made Christianity their religion and the Bible their idol. Rather than following the steps and words of Jesus, they have bowed to a cultural definition of Christianity. They think going to church and hanging with other Christians is the thing that separates them from culture and gets them a good standing with Jesus. They think studying the Bible will bring the eternal life they want, but they miss Jesus in the meantime.

That's why I don't want to be known as a conservative.

Why I don't want to be known as a Methodist.

Why I don't even want to be known as a Christian.

In fact, if someone is going to label me, I want to be known as a follower of Jesus. The Bible term for that is *disciple*.

We don't use the word *disciple* much in today's world. Just like the word *follower*, it requires further definition. No one is just a follower. They are a follower of someone or something. Likewise, no one is just a disciple. They are a disciple of someone.

Every few years, a major cult leader makes it into the headlines and you hear about his or her followers. David Koresh led the disciples of the Branch Davidian sect to their deaths in Waco, Texas. Jim Jones led disciples who followed him to their deaths in 1978, taking three hundred children with them. Although these are terrible incidents, they are indicative of what a disciple is. A disciple believes so fully in whom they are following that they are willing to die for that person.

Although less commonly used in the context, I've heard the term *disciple* in the management world. I've read articles about a CEO who is described as a "disciple of Jim Collins"

or a “disciple of Peter Drucker.” It indicates they follow and agree with just about everything that leader says.

The focus isn’t on the follower. It is on *who* they are following. The early disciples were known as Christians because they were followers of Christ.

I think it’s too late to try to redefine the word *Christian* for our world. That ship has already sailed. It isn’t my passion or interest to turn the strong tide of our culture away from what they think of Christianity. Rather than change people’s language, I want them to see Jesus in me. I want to live in such a way that my neighbors will remark, “There is something different about you.” I want to respond to conflict the way Jesus would respond. I want to treat my wife and kids the way Jesus would treat them. I want to run my business affairs with the highest integrity—no cut corners, no white lies, no manipulation tactics.

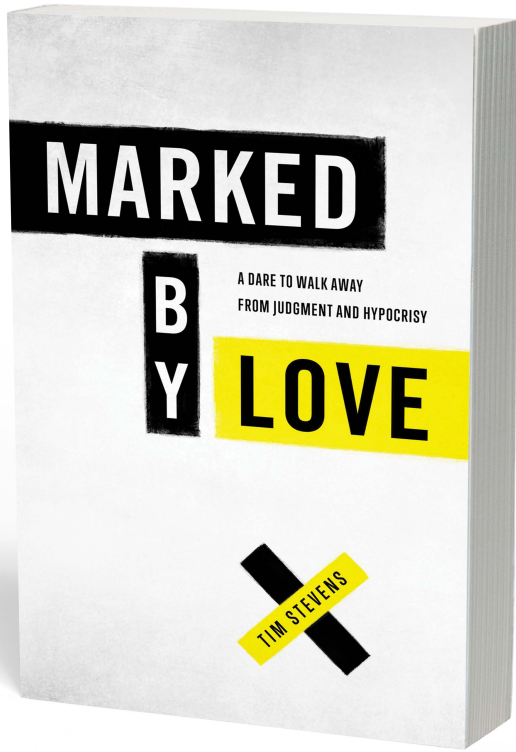
I want to be different. I want to be marked by love. If people follow me, I want to lead them to Jesus.

But what does that even mean? What is a “disciple” of Jesus? What would it take to show this world a different type of Christian? Is it really all about love? What about holiness?

So many questions. This is going to mean adopting an entirely different way of thinking—a way of thinking I started learning from Darrell many years ago.



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