

# Letters of ENCOURAGEMENT

God Loves You



No Matter What

February 16, 2022

A Note from Nikki Buskirk

**Dear Friends,**

It was the summer of 2020. Knowing what I know now, we were still just in the beginning of this pandemic. We were optimistic that things would soon go back to “normal” as we knew it.

I was at home with my boys, scrolling through TikTok, when I started seeing disturbing videos pop up. I went to another platform to see what was happening, and with great horror, I watched the video of a Black man’s life ending.



He called for his mom, and I completely broke.

In the following days protests and marches began to happen. Normally I would be down in the middle of them, but since we were in a pandemic I had to make the hard choice and stay home. That didn’t sit right for me. I felt I was letting down my people, that I was letting down my boys.

I did lots of talking, actually lots of screaming, at God. Screaming because I felt trapped, screaming because in this moment of history I didn’t want to be the person who did nothing.

I told God that when my boys are my age and they think back to this moment, I don’t want them to think that none of this mattered. That I didn’t fight for us. **If only in the midst of all that screaming I also had done a little listening, I would have known that God was telling me to hang tight, I have you.**

While this was happening, many companies put out statements saying they supported their Black and Brown employees and customers. We’ve learned since then that much of that

was performative marketing. They were just trying to capitalize on what was happening at the time, and many went back to status quo.



At the same time The Godly Play Foundation asked a question on their Facebook page. It was a simple question, yet an important one. **They asked, “Is Godly Play anti-racist?”** A majority of the answers that came in said that they were anti-racist.

**Having the perspective I have, in not only being a Godly Play storyteller but also a Black woman, I answered that no, they were not anti-racist.** I then listed several ways they weren’t, starting with the Faces of Easter, which at the time depicted a very white Holy Family.

I also talked about how all the sheep in the Good Shepherd story were all white. We know that sheep come in many different colors. We also understand that in this parable Jesus is using the sheep to represent God’s people. If that is the understanding, how could a Black or Brown person see themselves in that story?

This is where the “hang tight, I have you” message that God was trying to tell me came in.

**Godly Play reached out, and we had an amazing conversation. Soon they started making changes.** That fall we saw the sheep in the Good Shephard story include many different colors. The Faces of Easter story was changed to a better representation of what Jesus could have looked like, and they continued to make changes in other stories to be more inclusive. I checked this all off as a win and started to move on, thinking my job there was done.

**The problem is, when God sets you on a mission, you aren’t always finished when you think you are.**

In January 2021 the Godly Play Foundation put a rough draft online of their story about The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. While many praised it, there were some who had issues. Yours truly was one who had issues, and I spoke up about them.

You know what happened? I received a call from the Foundation asking if I could help them with this story — and not only help them with this story but help their company become more anti-racist.

I immediately called Pastor April, because I was feeling WAY out of my league. She helped me make great decisions, especially regarding how much mental and emotional work it takes as a Black person to help a group, a church, a company do anti-racist work. After that conversation, I had the confidence within me to help them with this work.

I'm now on their Beloved Me, Beloved We advisory board, where a very diverse group of us make sure the Foundation is staying true to their word in being an anti-racist, inclusive company both from within and also throughout their stories. I also will soon be trained to become a trainer of Godly Play trainers.

**While this is all exciting, I think my work in helping them write the story about Dr. Martin Luther King has been my proudest moment so far.**

The Dr. King story was truly a testament to Godly Play's intentions. They were wanting so badly to be *inclusive* that they ended up being *exclusive*. There was lots of back and forth between us around this story, from the importance of using his title correctly, to making sure they didn't weaponize "peaceful protest," to making sure they didn't erase his four Black children.



When the final changes to the story were complete and I received it, I cried. I cried because **I saw my boys in that story. I saw me in that story.** I saw how God was telling me to just hang tight.

A year later I had the great honor of telling our kids at Hilliard UMC the Dr. King story. Our kids (ages 4-11) were fully engaged and had so many thoughtful wondering questions, questions where you just knew God was sitting with them as they worked with it. At no time did they express any shame, which is so common when we talk about Black history. They were genuinely curious about him and the things that were happening.



While I'm aware that a story I helped make come true will be told around the world, my proudest moment was being able to share it with the HUMC kids. Maybe one day in the future I'll be able to share this story with you. Until then, you can head over to Godly Play Foundation's YouTube page, where I can be your

storyteller there (<https://youtu.be/NagWd8klTK4>). You might even recognize that sacred space.

**I know I'm nowhere near finished with God's work. Through all of this I have learned that sometimes it's just as important to sit and listen as it is to be active.** Sometime's God's plan doesn't manifest itself immediately. I have learned that sitting and hanging tight can sometimes be the right choice, and that if God has a plan for you, it's in those silent moments that you can hear them best.

**Sit a moment and listen. Is God nudging you to be active right now, or to sit and hang tight? Do you have those quiet moments to hear God?**

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