

Letters of ENCOURAGEMENT

God Loves You  No Matter What

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A Note from Michelle Dethlefsen

Dear Friends,

When I had my son, I quickly realized that I didn't know half of what I thought I did.

I was 24 and a single mom. I didn't really have a place to live, and I was determined to make my child feel as if he wasn't missing out in life due to the choices I made. I crashed at friends' houses, moved in with someone I barely knew, worked four jobs, and still barely made enough to survive (just over the limit to qualify for government assistance — I know because I tried to get help).

I got a better roommate, found a better job, and slowly clawed myself out of a pit of despair and got down to the business of becoming a SUPERMOM. I didn't want to just be a good mom, I wanted to be the best mom.

I worked full time, volunteered at my son's school, coached soccer, got very involved with Scouting, eventually went back to school (and got my bachelor's degree the same year my son graduated from high school), and continued to get better and better jobs.

On paper, and for those looking at my life, I was that "Supermom." I had it all, and I did it without complaint.

What people didn't always see was my stress — the moments that I yelled at my son for making us late, for not doing his homework, for not helping around the house, for the tiniest infractions that kids make all the time.

Was I a good mom? Yes. Was I always the best mom? No. What I didn't know was that people would categorize that all under parenthood. We all start out wanting to be the best parent, and we all fail many times over.



If you were to ask my child, he would tell me and anyone listening that I was the worst mom. I never actually listened all those times he said I was the worst mom, though, all the times he told me I was impatient; I didn't validate what he was feeling because I knew I had done the best I could, and my best really wasn't that bad.

Was I sorry he thought his life was so terrible? Of course. Sorry enough to change? No. I didn't know how to listen to what he was telling me; I had no reference for how I could have done better, because I thought I had done the best I could, and why should I apologize for doing my best?

Then I took the Deeper Waters class.

(<https://innovativeleadershipinstitute.mykajabi.com/deeperwaters>)

Wow, I quickly realized I had some apologizing to do.



I took the Deeper Waters class because I thought it was an answer to a prayer.

One night I was praying to God to fill something in me, something I didn't know was missing, something I couldn't even put my finger on. I asked Him to show me what it was so I could figure out how to fix it.

A week later I was scrolling Facebook and saw a post from a friend who was thinking about taking a course being offered through her church. It was a spiritual leadership class. I didn't even know what that meant, but

I stopped scrolling and sat and looked at it.

Was this my answer from God? Was I supposed to make an almost yearlong commitment, a huge financial commitment, based on a Facebook post by a friend? Apparently YES. I even scrolled past it and came back a few times before I commented, "I'm interested, I'll do this with you."

I still didn't know what class was going to be about when I went that first day. I was sitting in a room full of strangers getting the introduction: This was going to be a class that would teach me about leadership, and social location, and understanding yourself using the Enneagram, and how all three tied together with spiritual practice to gain spiritual leadership. Ok, got it (not really).

I've been to leadership classes in the past, communication skills, management trainings, etc. I always enjoyed them, figured that part would be easy. The Enneagram: I took an online test once, I'm an 8, a Challenger — anyone who knew me could tell you that. Social Location, um... what does that mean?

Little did I know then how much this class was going to change my life, change my relationship with my son.

This course takes you on a journey. It isn't just about three separate ideas and how you can apply a new skill set to your life. It isn't a 1+1=2 step-by-step instruction to life. It truly is about learning how all three things work together to shape your thoughts, your reactions to situations, and your interactions with others.

It's about understanding yourself, how you react to fears and stresses in healthy and unhealthy ways, how to listen to your body, quiet your mind, notice how you are feeling in situations, and, once you notice, how to give yourself time to make a choice.

You learn how to listen to others and validate where they are coming from, and how they are reacting at the same time you are, but reacting from a completely different lens than you are, and more importantly that you don't have to change everyone else in the world. It is okay to just notice yourself and change how you react (or don't react).

The best part for me was the change in my relationship with my 24-year-old son. The "worst mom in the world" finally saw why he would think that. It was like my life was the beginning of a Marvel movie, and I saw all these images and memories flipping by so quickly and I got it. I saw the way I reacted in stressful times while he was growing up, that it was not healthy (I yelled way too much and could never just let it go and had to control all the situations — but that is never possible, to control all the situations).

I took him to dinner, and I explained about the class and how I was learning how my body reacted to stress and fear and I didn't always react well and that I was sorry. I let him know that I still don't always react well, but that I was learning to notice the signs of stress and working on centering myself and taking a moment when I needed to.



I validated that he wasn't crazy to feel the way he felt, and he looked at me and told me that maybe I wasn't the worst mom in the world, and that he got it that it was hard being a single mom to a kid that was a lot like me.

Then he told me he loved me. I can count on one hand the times he has said those three words since he became a teenager. And that is what every parent wishes for when they hold that newborn baby in their arms for the first time: to be the best parent, hope that their child knows they are loved, and that their child loves them back.

Deeper Waters was the right choice for me. I honestly didn't know what I was signing up for, didn't understand the life impact it would have, and I can't wait to see the impact it continues to have on myself and others that I interact with daily.

I highly recommend this course. **If you are reading this and feeling that same void, that same feeling that something is missing, pray about it, and if you can, apply for the next cohort, which begins in January 2024.** (Details & link to application are here: <https://innovativeleadershipinstitute.mykajabi.com/deeperwaters>).

It is worth it.

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