



It wasn't rocket science.  
It was parenting.  
That was the problem

# The Motherhood Solution

By **TIERA FLETCHER**, Kihei, Hawaii

**T**his is all my fault, I berated myself as I held my wailing newborn, Micah, tight against me in the rocker. Beside me, my two-year-old son, MJ, was crying nearly as hard. Only my husband, Myron, was calm.

"The baby is fine, Tiera," he said. I could barely hear him over the bedlam. "Everything is going to be fine."

No, it wasn't. Nothing was going right. I'd been struggling ever since we'd come home from the hospital three weeks earlier. My every attempt to get things under control only seemed to make things worse. Like giving in to MJ's repeated requests to hold his baby brother on his own. Seconds later, the baby had slipped from his grasp, landing hard on the bed. Hence the uproar.

I slowed the rocker, seeking the right rhythm to soothe Micah. *Why is this so hard for me?* People had told me during

my pregnancy that raising an infant and a toddler would be the hardest job in the world, but I'd shrugged it off. My day job was figuring out how to send astronauts to Mars. That's right—rocket science. Plus, I was working on my master's degree in engineering management. Raising two young children? No problem.

Somehow my calculations had been way off. I was barely sleeping. The house was a mess. I choked back tears, not wanting Myron to think I was losing it. *I can do all things*, I told myself, a prayer I'd turned to for strength all my life. Now the words seemed to mock me. Micah's cries grew louder. Between sobs, MJ said he was sorry.

It scared me, this feeling of losing control. I thrived on order, on finding not merely answers to problems but

---

**MOTHERING TIMES TWO** Tiera takes joy in raising sons Micah (left) and MJ.

PHOTOS BY TONY NOVAK-CLIFFORD

perfect solutions. Excelling. God had blessed me with a mind that loved complexity, challenges, computations. That drive had been key to all I'd accomplished in my 27 years. Such as graduating from MIT with a degree in aerospace engineering. Going immediately to work on NASA's Moon to Mars mission rocket team, where I'd met Myron. We'd founded an outreach effort to encourage kids across the world to achieve their dreams in science and engineering. I'd coauthored my first published book, *Wonder Women of Science*. I'd taught MJ to walk while working full-time and taking grad school classes—all over Zoom due to Covid. Myron and I mentored high school students. I never took the easy route. A Black woman in engineering is still a rarity, and I didn't want anyone thinking I'd received special treatment. I wasn't afraid to be tested. But being a mom of two was something else entirely. Micah clearly needed more than I could give him. What did it matter if I could solve the physics of a rocket launch if I failed at motherhood?

"Let me take the baby," Myron said, louder. "You need a break."

I knew Myron could handle the baby. He was wonderful with both boys. But in that moment, it felt as if I would be surrendering something im-

portant. "No, I can do this," I insisted. "He needs his mother." I looked down at my beautiful baby, hoping for some sign of affirmation. The insistent cry that came from his tiny lips was not a vote in my favor.

The problems had begun in my ninth month of pregnancy. We'd gone for a routine checkup, only to learn my fluids were too low. "We'll need to induce labor," my doctor said. Everything had happened in a rush, spiraling out of control from there.

The hospital sent us home after only 24 hours. Myron's dad was on hand. My parents had come to help too, but they had to spend the first week quarantining upstairs because of Covid. That first night home with our new baby, I cooked dinner for five adults and MJ. Myron offered to cook, but it seemed easier to do it myself. After dinner, I caught up on email. The semester had just begun that day, and there'd been no time to let colleagues and my fellow students know I'd be out and missing classes. Most of them didn't know I was pregnant. I didn't want anyone thinking I needed a slower pace.

The next few weeks, I woke up at all hours to nurse. I held Micah as much as possible, knowing that mother-newborn bonding was so important.



**WELL-GROUNDED** Though Tiera and her husband, Myron, stay busy as rocket scientists, faith and family keep them centered.

do all things," I said. "But lately it seems like I can't do *anything!*"

Myron looked at me curiously. "That's not the whole verse, you realize?" he said, smiling. "You're leaving out the most important part."

*I can do all things...* How many times had I told my-

MJ felt threatened and confused. He loved his baby brother...but not all the attention I was giving him. MJ wanted me to hold him all the time too. He wanted to snuggle close too. When I'd finally get a minute to lie down and rest, MJ would check on me, making me his personal climbing wall. Then there was the begging to hold Micah. I couldn't take it. I'd finally given in.

And here was the result. It wasn't just Micah I'd failed. I'd failed MJ by not giving him enough attention. I'd failed Myron by being a nervous wreck. The house was in disarray. I hadn't cooked a healthy meal in days. I was behind on my schoolwork. How was I possibly going to manage when I went back to work after my maternity leave? *I can do all things*, I tried again. *If only.*

Myron put his hand on my shoulder. "Let me take care of the boys," he said. "You go and spend some time with Jesus. It'll do you good."

"I've been reminding myself I can

self that lately without finishing the verse? ...*Through Christ who strengthens me.* I'd fallen into a kind of shorthand version, one that didn't fully acknowledge the source of my strength, of all my blessings.

"Wow," I said to my husband. "You're right."

"Thank you, Jesus," I added, something else I'd forgotten to say in the tumult of the past few weeks. I didn't have to burn myself out trying to be the perfect mother, wife, scientist and grad student. God loved me just as I was, and he was there, along with Myron, to help me do all things.

I looked down at Micah. He was sleeping peacefully in my arms. MJ had quieted too, giving his baby brother a watery smile. I nodded at MJ and said, "See? Everything's fine."

Still, I handed Micah to his father. My Bible was calling me. ❧

For more on this story, see FAMILY ROOM

"I keep my eyes open for blessings—a hug from my son, a soft breeze on a sunny day, my cat looking at me and purring—and take a moment to give thanks to God."

—LISA GUERNSEY, Editor

DAILY DO