

Enough

by Callie Dean

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My husband is out of town this week for work. With trepidation, I tuck my boys into their beds. “Good night,” I whisper, and silently I add my own prayer, *Please, please, let them stay asleep until morning.*

Against the silence of the house, my nightly routine sounds louder than usual. I gather the last dishes from the dinner table and turn on the faucet, the running water drowning out the need for any other background music. I plunge my hands into the sink and relish the rhythm of scrubbing. The dishes seem to take forever, though the pile is one place setting short. Afterward, I move on to the laundry and pack lunches for the next day. With my last bit of energy, I manage to write a few lines in my journal before I fall into our bed, alone.

Two hours later, I awake to the sound of crying. It’s the baby. Miles. I lie in bed, willing him to go back to sleep, but the sound only escalates. I walk across the hall to settle him down. He is still drowsy, and after I pat his back, he falls agreeably back into his deep sleep. I wait—checking the clock, waiting the requisite five minutes just to make sure he’s going to stay asleep—then tiptoe back to bed, my feet practiced in the art of avoiding creaky floorboards.

Two more hours pass. This time my three-year-old, Luke, wakes up. Unlike the whimpers of his younger brother, his cries are loud and shrill. My body feels even heavier this time when I stand. By the time I reach their room, I’m too late. He has woken Miles up, and both boys are on high alert.

I pick Miles up out of his crib and sit on Luke’s bed, offering him my other arm. He screams louder. “I want you to lay down next to me,” he yells. “I want to snuggle your neck. I don’t want you to be holding Miles.”

“You both need me right now,” I say. “I can hold you both right here. And after Miles falls back to sleep, I will keep holding you.”

I’ve made this mistake before: using logic to reason with an inherently illogical three-year-old. He continues screaming, his anger dissolving into sad sobs.

Instantly, I am transported back: one and a half years ago. I was still sore from childbirth and bleary-eyed from cluster feedings. My husband, Jordan, returned to work, and I wasn’t sure how we would pass the long stretch of the day ahead. Our activities revolved around the slow, blissful pace of a newborn: feeding, changing diapers, sleeping. Late in the morning, we went outside for a short walk; Luke rode his toy excavator down the street while I pushed the stroller behind him. All three of us, I realized, were looking at the world in an entirely new way.

Not quite two years old, Luke was smitten with his baby brother. He checked on him in his swing, commented on the color of his poop, and kept him supplied with pacifiers. I beamed with pride when he decided to lie beside Miles during tummy time to “teach him how to turn his head.”

But the day eventually turned into evening. Once Jordan arrived home and we had finished dinner, he began putting Luke to bed while I nursed Miles to sleep in our room. We had decided the best way to tackle our nightly routine was to divide and conquer.

Luke didn't care about what made the most sense. He no longer cared about what his little brother needed; he only knew that I wasn't available to hold him anymore. “Mama!” he howled, drawing out the word in desperation. “Maaaaa! Maaaaa!”

For the first three weeks of Miles' life, I cried every night. It was excruciating, on some primal level, to be needed by these two small people at the same time, knowing I could not give myself fully to both of them at the same time. My postpartum soul felt as raw as my body, and each evening wounded it a little more. Here was proof, it seemed, that I wasn't quite fit for this job. My lap wasn't big enough for two, and I feared, neither was my heart.

My children are no longer newborns, but I feel that same anxiety creeping back whenever we encounter each new stage of childhood. I feel like I'm not prepared enough, firm enough, consistent enough, to take on the latest curveball my children have thrown at me, whatever it might be. Beneath it all, there lurks the core fear that I lack something essential in my DNA as a mother.

At each new milestone, I have to learn, once again, that I am enough—not because of anything that I'm doing, right or wrong, but simply because of who I am and Whose image I reflect. Brene Brown calls this mindset “wholeheartedness,” and I think Jesus once called it “abundance.” Whatever you call it, it is the antidote to scarcity: a reminder to show up with nothing more and nothing less than my whole self.

Enough doesn't mean perfect. It doesn't mean that I will always get it right or that everything will always go smoothly. There are still nights, like tonight, when no one sleeps, everyone screams, and I wish I could just slam the door and return to my room in peace.

But I stay.

I take a deep breath and steady myself, remembering the lessons I've already learned. My job isn't to fix everything or perform a magic trick to put them back to sleep. My job is to be as present as possible and trust that the rest will work itself out.

Eventually, Miles nestles back onto my shoulder with a yawn. Luke sidles closer and wraps his arms around my neck. I listen to his snuffles and run my fingers through his hair. I am no longer worried that I'm going to run out of room. My lap is crowded, of course, but it is full.

And so is my heart.