

## A Conversation with Tiffany Bluhm, Author of *She Dreams*

**Q. Your new book *She Dreams* is moving and practical, which is a difficult blend to pull off. When did the idea for this book first take hold?**

A. I lead a women's Bible study, and we got away for a few days for a retreat. I felt prompted to talk about dreams there. Being away that weekend, it felt like a good time to reflect on what could be, versus what is. As I shared about dreams, it was really eye-opening to see how many women feel that their dreams are so far out of reach. Depending on the life choices they've made, they feel like their dreams will never be part of their life again—never to be pursued in the present or future.

But God isn't done if we're still here. If we still have a pulse, He's able and longs to do more than we could even dream.

**Q. In the book, you really emphasize that no matter where someone starts—where they're born, what they look like, or what stage of life they're in now—everyone has a right to dream and to pursue those dreams. Do you think dreams feel like they're often for other people, or only a certain segment of the world's population?**

A. Yes. I think that in our world, we elevate people with power or prestige or the right pedigree—I'm not trying to use alliteration here, it's just happening so please forgive me (laughs). All of those factors are largely out of our control. So those of us who are the wrong color, wrong age, or come from a low socio-economic background—we feel like we've been passed up because we aren't smart or witty or resourced enough. We can feel like everyone else's dreams are going to come true and everyone else will rally around those people, but not us.

But the truth is, we all dream. No matter where we come from, what color we are, what age we are, or what gender we are, it's our birthright to dream.

**Q. Why does dreaming matter?**

A. The world we want to live in will not happen on its own. It will only happen when we chase after dreams that serve not only us, but serve the world around us. The best dreams are the ones that will outlive us, out-shine us, and serve people we may never even meet.

I think dreams are so tender to women. Any time I speak on dreams or have written about them, women just break. For so many women, dreams feel so far out of reach because they chose to have kids or chose not to go to school—whatever it is. They chose one path, and now they feel like they have to forfeit the great dreams that still beat in their hearts. That's just not true.

**Q. When you speak up as a voice for the disenfranchised, you're counting yourself among them. One issue you're most passionate about is adoption. You are a unique adoption advocate in that you pursued international adoption as a mom, but you were also left in a children's home in India at just two days old and then adopted internationally yourself. How did your own experience as a child shape your approach to adoption as an adult?**

**A.** I grew up wanting to be like the majority. I was constantly a minority—a deviation from the standard. I wanted the white skin, the beautiful birth story. I wanted baby pictures. I don't have one. I wanted a beautiful family tree like everyone else had when they showed up at kindergarten. I so badly wanted to be like everybody else, but knew I never would be. I felt so isolated.

I was internationally adopted, so not only was I not raised by the mother who held me in her womb, but I was also a stranger to a culture that should have been my own. The expectations people had of me when they saw me because of my skin—I wasn't able to meet those expectations. So, I didn't get to be like everybody else, but I also didn't get to be like my first culture. I was stuck in between.

I really struggled with a sense of identity, as many internationally adopted children do. I don't know one who hasn't. We have all felt that the people around us were not able to fully understand the weight of our trauma or pain or frustration. Many of us bottle it up. I certainly did.

As I worked through that as an adult and found my identity in Christ, I was really able to see that God redeems those broken storylines and replaces them with Himself.

Ten years ago, when my husband and I first married, I never would have said, as we walked down the aisle, "Oh, let's adopt first." We always assumed that foster care or adoption would be part of our family's story at some point. But before having any biological children, we adopted our son from Uganda. Now, on the other side of international adoption as an adoptive mother, I have an even greater understanding that children belong in families. No one deserves to be treated as leftovers or institutionalized.

I'm also sensitive to the fact that internationally, many women do not abandon their children because they want to. It's often due to poverty. That's a whole other conversation about how we should be empowering first mothers and supporting them in practical ways..

But, back to the original point: As an adoptive mother, I knew I wasn't the answer to my son's story. I am a helper and a player, but I am not his savior. I knew he'd have trauma and longing for a woman he had no intimate knowledge of. I saw myself as someone who could encourage him to work through his trauma and pain, and then find Christ to be the answer to his broken pieces.

My son is 8 now, and he longs to be with his birth mother. I experienced those same longings. It's my job to encourage a strong sense of identity and encourage him to own his story: just because you're different doesn't mean you're wrong. Just because your birth story didn't start in a western hospital with baby pictures and all the bells and whistles doesn't mean you don't belong.

**Q. In *She Dreams*, you don't shy away from the reality that women face in the workplace: you acknowledge that culturally, we're often expected to be silent or are held to double standards when it comes to behavior, especially communication. Why was this important for you to include?**

A. I was in my son's class one morning volunteering, and another little boy labeled a little girl bossy. She was just trying to get people organized, trying to lead, and so excited to be the line leader. It's interesting that from the beginning, girls feel penalized for having leadership gifts or wanting to work hard.

We're mislabeled, and we take those labels to heart. So as women, when it's time to have hard conversations and we don't fit other people's expectations as amiable and tender, when we have to be direct and don't fit the picture-perfect view of a subservient woman, there is conflict.

But the truth is, women's true voices are needed in the workplace and at the table where decisions are being made.

**Q. What are a few key pieces of advice that you have for women who are leaders in business?**

A. Don't demean other women because you feel threatened. So many of us who have achieved leadership positions feel that there is only room for one, maybe two women in positions of power. So, we oppress our sisters when in reality, it's our honor to elevate them to places of leadership and power.

Other advice to women in leadership: Try to address another person's intention when they bully you, demean you, demonize you, pit others against you. Address their humanity. See where they're coming from. I think being able to address where people are coming from and why they're treating us the way they are goes a long way toward building a connection to someone who may not understand or appreciate a woman's position. Work cultures are changed when we have empathy for others. When we care about the heart of others, their growth, and their success.

**Q. You also tackle the ever-present success at home vs. professional success dilemma in a unique way. You say that these realms can and should support one another instead of compete with one another. Can you talk a little bit about what you mean by that?**

A. When we view home life as a completely different life and identity than our work life and passion, that's disastrous. We're trying to be two people with different lives. In reality, those lives should be enmeshed together, working together, one making room for the other.

There is obviously times when there are things at home that demand more attention, more emotion, more money, more time. We have to be able to read situations and see where we should direct our intention and emotional investment. But this idea that there are two separate lives, in reality, holds us back. So think, how can you invite your people in your home—your family or your tribe—to not be pitted against your work, but working with it?

An example: I travel a lot for my work. One night, my son said, "Man. You're going to be gone on a Wednesday?" I wasn't missing his tennis practice or a soccer game or anything. It was an open day on the calendar. I said, "Buddy, isn't it so sweet that we can all work together as a family, and that you, Daddy, and your little brother can send me out to do what we believe God has called us to do as a family, and then we can come back and be together?"

He said, "Oh yeah! Okay." Now, he doesn't always take it that well, but this time, he said, "I'll go pray for you and the people you're going to see." It's just an example of shaping the narrative. It doesn't have to be one or the other; family and profession can work together.

It takes a village to raise a child. It also takes a village to see a dream come true.

I think we also have to understand that we're only one woman. We have limitations. For example, I'm not a great cook. I have no intention of being one either—that's something I'm happy to sacrifice. That's not where I'm going to excel at home. My husband takes the lead on laundry and makes dinner. Don't get me wrong—it'd be absolutely filthy if I didn't live here. It's clean because of me and he knows that. But I don't do everything at home. In our relationship, we look at who's best at what. It's not my job to run a full home without investment and sacrifices from him. He's not a babysitter, he's a father. He's not a guest, he lives here. If he wants clean clothes, he's going to have to be a participant in making that happen.

**Q. Daily life has a way of making dreams seem far away. You stress that everyone dreams and has a right to dream. What advice do you have for the person who really feels lost—like maybe they don't have a big dream to chase?**

A. To the woman who feels lost: there is a good chance you feel disappointed. Disappointment has made a home in your heart, and time and time again, when you've sought new endings to broken storylines, you've felt empty-handed, lost, and frustrated.

It can be an exhausting thing to think that dreams are even something you should be spending your time on. It feels like such a waste. You may think to yourself, “Why would anything good happen to me?”

So often, we stare down our future through the lens of our past. If our experience is troubled, we sure as heck don’t think things are going to bend in our favor in the future. But the truth is, the dreams that have died—those disappointments we’ve encountered—could very well be the fuel that makes us the ideal person not just to pursue our dreams, but to see them come true.

**Q. And what do you have to say to the dreamer who has big ideas but doesn’t know where to start?**

**A.** Begin with the end in mind. What do you want your dream to look like eventually? In order to start something, you have to decide first who you’re going to be—who do you need to be who can handle the things that can happen? You have to spend time on and invest in the person you need to become.

Every day, no matter what you do, no matter where you work or live, you are given opportunities to develop your character. If you don’t have high character, then all the connections and money in the world can’t help you, because who you are is far more important than what you do.

**Q. You have a way of bringing issues into relief that are universal but also not necessarily addressed enough. Take the recent post you wrote for the [TODAY Parents Blog](#): you wrote about those days when you don’t allow your child to be a child. For those who didn’t read it—or even those who did—can you talk a little bit more about what you mean and why this matters?**

**A.** We expect our kids to meet our expectations 24/7, 365. But children are raw materials intended to be built into someone great, and we are aids in the journey of building a strong, kind man or woman. In the process, we are constantly reminded that they are figuring out the world around them and they need grace for the journey.

If I have a bad day, I might come home, have a bubble bath, and maybe eat some chocolate cake. But if my kid comes home after a bad day, I’m like, “What’s your problem? You need to pull it together.” I don’t let him be a human with emotions, feelings, and hurts.

Now, I’m type A, so I know many women are more empathetic than I am. (laughs) But the truth is, we really do expect perfection. We don’t allow our children room to simply be—to stumble or fail, because we want them to fit in the picture we have of our lives, of our families. And even more than that, we want them to fit in the picture of what we believe other people think about us.

**Q. You're also the co-host of a podcast called [Why, Tho?](#) What do y'all cover and who should listen?**

**A.** My co-host Ash Abercrombie and I answer the big questions, like, *Why do your eyebrows look so good, though?* as well as existential crises. We've covered things like why you need to stop making excuses for people, why quitting could be the best decision ever, and why you need to turn off your phone. We're here for all of it. We're two women, from vastly different backgrounds, who want to help provide answers. We're not perfect, but we have both lived some life and are eager to offer honest conversations to encourage women everywhere.

**Q. You're a Bible teacher, but you also contribute to popular secular outlets like [ScaryMommy.com](#). How does your faith inform your writing for outlets like ScaryMommy, and how does your secular culture know-how inform the way you approach your faith?**

**A.** It's something I'm really passionate about. I live in the Seattle area. It's not a densely churched region of America. I speak to and minister to people on a regular basis who have a limited knowledge of church culture as mainstream—it's different than living in Middle America or the Bible Belt. I believe that if you want to bring Jesus to people, you have to do it in a way they understand. The first way to do that is finding common ground and address felt needs that we all face, whether you are a woman of faith or have no faith at all.

A piece I wrote for ScaryMommy that was shared more than 10,000 times was about my son we adopted from Uganda. At the time I wrote the post, he was about 4, and he did not know he was black. He didn't refer to himself as black, and nobody had ever told him he was black. Then, his little brother came along, and he called him black. But until he had a sibling, he'd never been referred to as black.

My point in my article was that he doesn't *yet* know what it means to be a black man in America because he was only four. He was playing with Peppa Pig. He wanted to be a super hero and was learning how to brush his teeth. He did not know about prejudices people would have against him as he got older and the systemic racism black men in America experience on a daily basis. He had yet to learn about the strides made by great activists and emancipators towards equal rights in years gone by.

These issues are all of our issues, whether you are a person of faith or not. What's going on in our world should not be separate from the conversations we're having in our church. The questions and struggles that humanity has are not divided between Christians and those who don't practice faith in God. If you have a human heart, you're struggling, and I think connecting there first—just as people—is crucial.

**Q. If readers walk away with just one big idea after reading *She Dreams*, what do you hope it is?**

**A.** It is not selfish to pursue your dream, no matter who you are, your track record, what you have or don't have. Dreaming is your birthright. And God will partner with you as you pursue him, the Dream Giver.

### **About Tiffany Bluhm**

Tiffany Bluhm wants every woman to recognize, embrace, and pursue the big dreams and beauty born inside of them. The author, blogger, speaker, teacher, podcast host, wife, and mother shares her personal stories of self-value and self-doubt, international adoption, entrepreneurship, marriage, heartbreak, motherhood, and more with an ever-growing audience now numbering in the hundreds of thousands. In addition to reaching readers via her own [blog](#), Tiffany shares her disarmingly perceptive, honest, and frequently funny writing on other popular outlets including [ScaryMommy.com](#), *Deeply Rooted Magazine*, and more. As co-host of the [Why Tho](#) podcast and an in-demand speaker, Tiffany also leads key conversations about modern faith, contemporary women, culture, and so much more. She has penned two books: the acclaimed Bible study *Never Alone*, released in February 2018, and the upcoming SHE DREAMS: LIVE THE LIFE YOU WERE CREATED FOR, set to hit bookstore virtual and brick-and-mortar shelves in February 2019. Tiffany lives in Tacoma, Washington, with her husband and two young sons.

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