

## An interview with Tiffany Bluhm, Author of *Never Alone*



Loneliness is on the rise in our society and impacting people of all ages. Research has shown that it increases stress and high blood pressure, weakens blood flow and immune systems, and is linked to mental disorders, depression, and even early death. It isn't something to ignore, but rather it's a signal for us to pay attention. Unfortunately, its negative associations, such as a weakness perception or feeling of having poor social skills, impede people from being honest about where they stand. To make matters worse, it has contagious tendencies, and our social networking culture makes it viral. To break the cycle, we need to understand what loneliness does and the behavior it encourages, seek to be more positive and discerning, and retrain how we think about people. For persons of faith, that includes re-evaluating what loneliness has led us to believe about God and our relationship with him. The debut book, *Never Alone: Exchanging Your Tender Hurts for God's Healing Grace* (Abingdon Press), by Bible teacher and speaker Tiffany Bluhm serves as a guide to help women do just that.

**Q: Of all the fears there are in the world, how prevalent is the fear of being alone?**

As little girls, we feared playing alone on the playground. In middle school, we feared sitting alone at lunch. In high school, we feared going alone to the prom. As adults, we fear we may never marry or have children. We fear our husbands may leave us. We fear we will be left to our solitary selves to fight the hardest battles of our lives. We spend our lives doing our absolute best to prove we are lovable and valuable, never to be ignored or left alone.

**Q: Why do women need to hear and be reminded they are never alone?**

Hearing they are never alone addresses women's worst fear that they'll be left alone, rejected by the people around them simply for who they are, what they have done, or what's been done to them.

**Q: What was your inspiration for writing *Never Alone* and its companion Bible study?**

Too many women, including myself, have wondered if our life experiences disqualify us from the intervention and hope of Jesus. I was inspired by my own struggles (including abandonment at birth, being dumped by the man of my dreams, and losing a child in the adoption process) and struggles of close friends that we are not only loved by Jesus but given a beautiful identity as we follow him.

I've always believed women play a critical role in society, one that is intended to be defined not by culture but by Christ. *Never Alone* exposes the truth of a woman's value and vision when she believes in God and who he designed her to be.

**Q: What is the main message you have for your readers? Whom did you write *Never Alone* for?**

*Never Alone* claims you are not too far gone, beyond repair, or too broken for the companionship and grace of Jesus. Jesus restores dignity to women when the world tries to rip it away from them. The person you were intended to be is found when you work through the dark parts of your story and soul and cling to Christ through it all. If you ask him, the light of Christ will heal you, restore you, and lead you on.

*Never Alone* is for women who have allowed shame, despair, rejection, and loss to define their lives. No matter how small the incident or how big the trauma, we were built to walk in the fullness of God, never a counterfeit version determined by our life's aches and pains.

**Q: How did being adopted contribute to feelings of shame and loneliness throughout the years? Did adopting your son change how you viewed your own experience?**

From my earliest memories, I remember feeling different. I knew straight away I was different. My family is white, and I am East Indian. My childhood was spent wishing my skin was brighter and my story didn't involve a mama

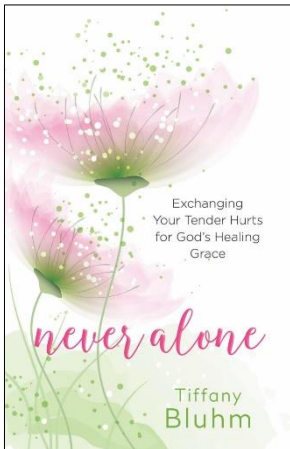
giving up her baby. However, that was my story. I've wrestled with shame and loneliness for being different, for being abandoned. No matter who you are, when the understanding of your origin story is understood, one that begun with abandonment, it messes with your understanding of worth.

I own just one baby picture of myself, taken at five months. I'm wearing a simple cloth diaper with my muppy black hair piled atop my head. My pursed lips appear to be permanently carved on my face. Every time I look at that picture my heart drops. Even at five months old I was scared and unsure of everything around me. Those overwhelming emotions of fear and uncertainty, my demons, were already there for me to fight, not only as a child, but also as an adolescent, and later still as an adult.

Shame never lets us rest. It reminds us how we feel about ourselves when we'd rather forget. It's a mark of something deeper. It evokes emotions that cause us to question why we wallow in them day after day. Yet, every shameful thought in us has a story, a birthplace deep in our core. It grows as we grow. Shame threads itself through our ideas, dreams, and hopes. It convinces us we aren't good enough, strong enough, or worthy enough for anyone's love and affection.

Adopting my son gave me an understanding of God's extravagant love for the brokenness in all of us. It was as though he pulled back the curtain to reveal his deep love and willingness to restore all that has been broken and lost. Yet, at the same time, it's wild and sometimes heartbreaking to see my son struggle with many of the issues I did as a child. To work through these issues with him has given me, as an adult, a double dose of compassion and a rock-solid belief that God can redeem each and every broken part of us.

**Q: You write about six women from Biblical history and their stories of hurt. Who were they, and how do their stories affect ours?**



The six women from the Gospels are the woman caught in adultery, the woman with the issue of blood, the woman at the well, the woman who anointed Jesus with oil, Mary Magdalene, and Mary, mother of Jesus. Each woman had an encounter with Jesus that radically redefined her value and role in society. Each of those encounters with Jesus pulls back the curtain on how God views women, how he values them in the Kingdom, and their innate worth. Jesus saw fit for women to serve as image bearers, receivers of restoration, speakers of truth, and valiant leaders for the cause of Christ.

The women of the gospels felt the sting of rejection, shame, and fear. Like them, I've fought battles to claim my true identity defined not by the world, but by the death and resurrection of Jesus. In a world of do's and don'ts, Jesus cut through the noise to speak value, love, and companionship to women. The same is true today. This is a noisy world, but Jesus isn't white noise to be ignored. He's the giver of the life we crave.

**Q: How do feelings of fear, shame, and inequality steal a woman's role as indispensable in the Kingdom?**

Our fears and shame keep us from believing the truth of who we are and whose we are. We were built to be loved and live from a place of love, value, and power in Christ. Shame has kept far too many women from rising to play the role of peace giver, truth teller, and justice seeker. Our shame, like a veil that blurs our vision, keeps us from seeing the purposed role each woman was born to take.

**Q: What are some of the things we do to protect ourselves from shame and rejection that in actuality make things worse?**

We isolate to escape rejection, but in turn, we forfeit connection. We pass on the gracious love of Christ that is to be received and shared. Received by Christ himself and his people. Our isolation costs us love from others that could point us to the redeeming hand of Jesus.

We convince ourselves that in isolation, no one can hurt us. In isolation, we can be invincible. In isolation, we can be in control of what happens to us. While our attempt to survive is noble, it leaves us feeling even more rejected than we ever imagined.

At five years old, as soon as I understood the story of my birth and abandonment, it wasn't long before I began to fantasize about what it would be like to meet my biological mother and visit the orphanage where I was left. I wanted to know every detail of my story, however broken and disjointed it may have been. I wanted what I believed everyone around me had. I wanted answers. I would visit friends and see baby pictures on the wall and baby footprints pressed into plaster. I wanted that. I wanted a story without gaping holes and unanswered questions, so I isolated myself from others because I did not have what they did. Isolation was the result of feeling inadequate, unworthy, and shameful.

**Q: How do our relationships change when we begin to believe fully that Christ will never leave us? Once we realize He is always with us, are we better equipped to conquer loneliness in our daily lives?**

A soul without Christ will hunger for someone to make it complete. We were built to abide in Christ, and if we don't, too often we'll seek and search for someone else to fulfill us. To be our everything. It's a misplaced need that no human can bear, but Christ can. We can't put on others what only Christ can do. When the companionship of Christ is enough for us, we change, as do our relationships.

You see, what we believe about ourselves is projected onto our relationships. The healthier the soul, the sweeter the relationships around us. Our brokenness made whole is not only for us. Others will see the glory of God at work in our life when we experience it for ourselves.

**Q: You suggest women forgo healing when they fail to see God's presence in their hardest memories and toughest trials. How does revisiting the past help with the healing process?**

You and I are who we are today because of the experiences of our past. If we want to work through our current struggles, it will serve us well to revisit the past experiences that have affected how we see ourselves, others, and God. If we are able to identify those contributing factors of the past we can invite Christ in to those tender moments. We can ask him to redeem what has happened ten, twenty, thirty, or forty years ago.

You know what is really good news? Jesus' grace is retroactive. It can redeem the hurts of the past if only we offer up those aches and pains. We must remember that God isn't the cause of our misfortune or pain; he is the answer. Sometimes we want to push him away because we think he failed to save us from whatever tragedy occurred, but that's not the case. He is the healer of tragedy, not the cause.

**Q: What are some other factors that work against women in their journey to restoration?**

Honestly, the lies we believe about ourselves, coupled with festering resentment and bitterness for the way things have turned out in life, make for some hefty stumbling blocks. Sometimes, you don't know where to start in your hunt for restoration. You and I can easily question if Jesus' grace is capable of doing all it claims it can.

In our deepest hurts is when we decide who Jesus is—not just in the good times, but in the hard ones. If we aren't able to identify the presence of Jesus in our pain we may wonder if he can restore our broken moments that leave us lonely and confused.

**Q: In addition to the book itself, what other resources are available to go along with *Never Alone* for further study?**

In addition to the book, the companion Bible study is available for further study, which includes six half-hour video sessions that dive into six encounters Jesus had with women in the gospels, each revealing his beliefs about women and each revealing He, indeed, was the Messiah. Each woman found she was loved by Christ, and once she encountered Jesus, her life would never be the same.

There is a workbook, leader's guide, leader's kit, and DVD.

**Keep up with Tiffany Bluhm and read her blog at [www.TiffanyBluhm.com](http://www.TiffanyBluhm.com). She is also active on [Facebook \(TiffanyABluhm\)](#), [Twitter \(@tiffanybluhm\)](#), and [Instagram \(@tiffanybluhm\)](#).**