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## Interview with Donna Schaper

**There is an all-too-common and pervading sense that we have more to do than we can possibly get done in the time we have.** Most of us live with some version of "time famine". The trick, according to Donna Schaper in her insightful new book on the subject, *Time: From Famine to Feast*, is to move from famine to feast, from a sense of not having enough time, to a sense of freedom, enjoyment, and fulfillment within the time we have.

**Rev. Dr. Donna Schaper**, formerly at Yale University, is Senior Minister for Judson Memorial Church at iconic Greenwich Village in New York City. Schaper's purpose in life is to "kick hope into high gear" and show people what is possible through the magnificence of human community strategically focused and spiritually filled. Her voluminous writings tell the tale of her interfaith marriage, her career as an ordained woman, her quiet spirituality and noisy activism.

Wood Lake: Good morning, Donna, and thank you for joining me today. We're going to discuss your book, *Time*. You say in the opening page of your book that you never have enough time and that time famine has no boundaries. Was your realization of this boundary what inspired you to write this book?

Donna: Absolutely. I realized that there was something wrong with my relationship with time and that obviously, this kind of hyper-busy Donna Schaper wasn't that much fun and I wanted to have fun. I wanted to be able to enjoy time, as opposed to watch it pass me by. I came up with this word, the 'time famine.' Why are you so hungry for time when you have plenty of time? You have, frankly, all the time you're going to get, and you don't have any less than anybody else.

I look back, I look forward and I think, "Why am I kind of greedy for time or

grubby for time when what I want to be is grateful for time?" That's why I wrote the book and I realized very much that I was not alone. I know a lot of people who kind of do the Shakespearean thing of, "Were there, but world enough in time," that kind of winsome lament that we don't feel we have enough when clearly we do. I wrote to that problem I was having in my relationship with time, and also out of observation as a pastor of what things other people were saying to me. It was a kind of deep listening to a problem towards a solution.

WL: Well said. I think that you're a very busy woman and for you to say that, makes you a great role model. You can show other people how they can manage their time a little better. What I found interesting is that you wrote "time famine is not the sin. The sin is our participation in it" and that we "need to let go of the notion that we are more important than we are and that God is less important than God is." Can you maybe just touch on that briefly?

Donna: Sure, I mean time is a gift from God or a gift from our creator. I think most people feel that way. Even if they don't buy the whole package that goes with that, they know they didn't create time. They know it came as a gift and not as a get. You don't earn your time. You are given it and to kind of look a gift horse in the face or in the mouth, as we say in that ridiculous saying and say, "Well, gee, thanks a lot for giving me something I don't know what to do with," when actually time is so very precious. We have so many choices in regards to time: how we feel about it, how we treasure it, how we waste it, how we think about it.

I really wanted to move from seeing my time famine as a time feast. What was wrong with me, was that I had way too many things I wanted to do and too many things I wanted to be in a short time including enjoying time and just letting it kind of roll over me and be a part of me.

What I did was change my attitude towards time and say that my problem really was that I was always trying to do three things in time that would fit

one. I try very hard to just do one thing at a time and that makes a huge difference.

WL: Yes, that's a great way to look at the use of time and how to change your attitude towards time. That leads to my next point, you say "God has a point of view on time" and on page 43, you say you "need to create a theology, a way to think about God that is simple enough to be true for you." What do you mean by that?

Donna: That it's just so simple that I did not create myself and I did not create my time. I did not earn my time. I was given my time. I was created, and understanding yourself as a creature rather than a creator or a creative, as we like to say in Manhattan, "I'm a part of the creative class, you know?" Okay, good for you, but you're still a creature and we really have been made quite wondrously, even made so wondrously that we can quarrel with God about giving us more time. I don't think that. That just doesn't make sense and it moves you into that greedy position from which you destroy the time you do have.

WL: Exactly, I think we're all guilty of that and/or wishing for time to pass quicker. I remember as a young child hoping that I could grow up sooner, but as you say time is very precious, and therefore we shouldn't wish it away.

Donna: Right, or grow up sooner, or get out of the house sooner, or grow old less slowly, I mean whatever manipulation you choose wastes time. See, I don't really like the word, management, when it comes to time. I think that's another sneaky form of capitalism, to tell you the truth. By the way, I like capitalism just fine, except when it gets too big for its britches and comes into places where it doesn't belong. I think that I had internalized a kind of constant growth, always more mentality and I was really harming myself in wanting more when I already had so much. I've learned that there's a beautiful truth in the 'less is more phrase' and less is not just more, as I say in the book, it's also less. When you create margins on your overly full list

of things to do on that page, you really can enjoy the ones that are sitting right there in front of you very much.

WL: Good point. You also talk about choices and how our world is changing. In the past we were supposed to be our work and your grandson's response to, "What do you want to be when you grow up," and his reply, "A Daddy," shows how the younger generation will lead the redefinition of time. Do you agree?

Donna: Well, of course I love what my grandson said because it said that he wasn't, he hadn't internalized capitalism yet, you know, be a doctor, or a lawyer, or somebody famous. It really honors the role of a male parent and it also had a sense of, being enough.

It'd be enough for me just to be a mom -hear my language" Just be a mom." -Obviously I'm more ambitious than that but why? Why did I internalize that greed for more? What if I wasn't a mom? What if I was just one thing? Wouldn't that be fine and wouldn't it get rid of this time famine or this constant trying to fit more into time?

WL: Exactly, you say, "How do you love a family, or a companion, or a best friend, or even a dog or a cat when you are exhausted physically, mentally, and spiritually by work? We let work define us sometimes and maybe that capitalizes on time, like you said. Can you expand on this statement a little bit more?

Donna: Well, I have found that my work will expand to fill all the time I give it, and it will also contract. If I do eight things today as opposed to sixteen. If those eight things are done well and with a positive, appreciative, almost a happy, funny, giggly attitude, "Oh my gosh I got to do that today! " if I do it that way, doing those eight things that well really helps me.

WL: Exactly that's your point of "the time feast is to own your time and not be owned by time."

Donna: Exactly, and to own and receive. I mean, I really believe there's a lot to being somewhat passive about time, you know, that we receive it. It comes again, as a gift as opposed to actively managing it. Let's use the eight and sixteen: if today I do eight things well and joyfully and then thought, "Oh, if I could just sneak in three more," right? Then I'll sneak in three more and I'll feel good about myself because I got more done. Hear that language: "Got more done," yeah, as opposed to "took the time to"

My office is across the street from a beautiful park, I really like to walk in that park. If I punctuated each of my eight activities with a little walk in a park, imagine what a great day that would be for me. I wouldn't say "how come I can never get to the park?" It's self-punishment. That is what it is. It's just self-punishment.

WL: That's just like how you incorporate Stephen Covey's book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*, and how you say most of us are stranded between the urgent and the immediate and we never get to the important matters of our lives. Like you said, the walk in the park.

Another chapter of your book is called, "Real Technology and Spiritual Technology." You say technology has resulted in a new unspoken rule to be constantly turned on and never turned off with particular reference to the internet. I'd never heard of spiritual practices as technology, I found that interesting. What did you mean by that?

Donna: Well, I think spiritual practices are tools just like technology is a tool, and we can practice being spiritual, as much as we can practice being good at social media. I think of prayer as a spiritual technology. It's something that you pause to do. I've always defined prayer as pause. I think that it's a spiritual technology to keep as much Sabbath as you possibly can.

WL: Yes, and that was one of the points that you made: "Sabbath is also a time-honored way to feast and I think that some people forget that." How does

Sabbath connect to time feasting?

Donna: Well, instead of filling up time, you empty time. Instead of always doing, you stop intentionally doing and add a kind of being to your relationship to time. Keeping a good Sabbath doesn't have to take twenty-four hours or twenty-five hours as Jews do. It could be an afternoon if you have to work Saturdays or Sundays. That walk in the park I think of as a Sabbath. I just decide I'm not going to stay alert. I'm going to allow my unconscious and my meditative side to catch up with my active side for a while. It really helps you think. When you're constantly thinking, or constantly responding, or constantly online, it's like somebody's banging on your head all the time. Then, other people are in charge of you and spiritual technology is a refusal to let other people be in charge of you all of the time. It doesn't mean you're not in relationship, but you can be in a better relationship the more you're in charge of yourself.

WL: You say that the secret is not to worry so much about what you're doing or not getting done, but rather you need to worry about your being you say goofballing is a way to worry about your being. Can you explain goofballing?

Donna: Goofballing is a low cost form of personal entertainment and when I die I hope people will- I hope I'll have an accomplishment or two and I hope that they'll say that I was a wonderful goofballer. Goofballing is just goofing off, and being silly, and being frivolous, and doing things that aren't useful. Because some of the self-punishment that comes from internalized capitalism is always being useful, always accomplishing something, always doing things that matter. I really believe in doing things that don't matter and that's what goofballing is. Goofballing is something you just don't have to do at all. I like to take the long way. I like to walk the long way to work. I like to drive the long way to wherever I'm driving. I like to get lost while I am driving or walking. I like to forget my cellphone and goofballing is just a way of being in utter delight about the time that you're living in. For me, it's the most important part of the feast.

WL: In such a time driven society though, a lot of people might feel guilty for goofballing. Is that something that you also felt at the beginning? Now you seem quite comfortable, but at the beginning was it a struggle?

Donna: No, I think I was that kind of a kid. In fact, I feel guilty when I don't goofball. I feel more deeply guilty when I don't goofball because I feel like I'm insulting God, and insulting joy, and that I've just become so full of myself. I really don't like that person. I like the lighter person more, the goofballer.

It's not a brag because I have as much trouble with time as anybody else.

WL: Well, that's very interesting and a good point. In that, what is your biggest struggle that you face day-to-day in regards to living in a time feast?

Donna: Email.

WL: Yes, I think we all feel that.

Donna: I think that mostly I manage time, and it doesn't manage me. I was always the kind of person who answered her mail the day it came in, you know, back in the days of snail mail. I really want to answer all my emails within the time they come in because I don't want them following me around. If I choose not to stay up with them, then they follow me around, you know? They make a little nest in my head. If I do answer them it takes me all the time I have, but then I don't get to go for a walk in the park or do any goofballing. It's a double bind of a kind.

WL: Yes, I didn't think of it that way. I guess time is a constant juggle of priorities and what is important to you. What should readers take away as the single most important tip for moving into a time feast?

Donna: I think it's that whole business about your own personal mission. If you

don't know exactly what you're here on earth to do, and if you're doing somebody else's bidding all the time, you will always be in a time famine because they'll always be you trying to war with them. Really knowing what your own mission in life is and knowing that it doesn't have to even be fancy. It can just be, like the old fashioned mission of the Calvinist was, to love God and praise God for ever. If that's what you're here to do, do it, and then go to work, but make sure you're also doing that. People who don't have an aim in life waste time. It's really important to know what you want to do and to have a lot of agency in your life. A lot of women in particular don't think it's right to have so much agency, but to wake up in the morning and say, "I want to do this," is really important and then, go do it and fit the things other people want you to do into a secondary place.

WL: Okay, so it's about organizing your time too?

Donna: It's making decisions. It's constantly giving yourself the freedom and the grace to make decisions.

Interviewer: Samantha Michaels

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**Donna Schaper**

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