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Intro: Hey friends! Welcome to Girls Night. I'm Stephanie May Wilson and I am so happy that you're here. Each week I have a girlfriend over and we talk through one of the biggest questions we have about our lives as women.

We're talking about friendships and faith and relationships and self-confidence, about our calling in life, and how to live every bit of our lives to the absolute full. Life is so much better and easier and more fun when we navigate it together as girlfriends. And I cannot wait to get started.

So, friends, I am so excited to officially be back for Season 14 of the Girls Night Podcast. And I'm even more excited because recently I had the honor and the privilege of interviewing my all-time favorite author, Shauna Niequist. And that's the conversation you're going to get to hear today.

If you've been part of our corner on the internet for a while now, you've probably heard me mention Shauna and her books. Her words and her stories and her wisdom have impacted my life and truly shaped who I am as a person, as a writer, as a friend, and now as a mom.

Shauna has a new book coming out in just about a month. It's called *I Guess I Haven't Learned That Yet: Discovering New Ways of Living When the Old Ways Stop Working*. In it, she talks a lot about life in the midst of transition. Today, she's going to be talking us through some of the things that we all need to hear in the midst of life's biggest transitions. And I cannot wait for you to hear what she had to say.

But before we dive in, there's a free resource I wanted to make sure to tell you about. This is for the women in our community who are single and dating. It is one of my all-time favorite resources. I would love to get to send it to you.

So here's a question for you. If your person walked into your life tomorrow, would you be ready? A mentor helped me reflect on this question in my own life just a few years before I met my husband Carl. For years I had thought I was ready. I felt ready. And by that I mean my heart often ached with how much I wanted to meet my person and get married.

But when she asked me this question, and when I really took the time to answer it, I was surprised by the fact that maybe I wasn't so ready after all. There was a lot more living and healing and reflecting that I needed and wanted to do before I got

married. And my mentor helped me see that if I did those things, the marriage I'd end up with would be so much better as a result. She was so right.

Friends, that question and the journey it led me on changed my whole marriage, the whole thing. And it changed it before it even started. And that's what I knew I had to pass this question along.

I put together a quiz and it's called, *Are You Ready to Meet Your Person?* And through eight reflection questions and an in-depth answer guide, it'll help you reflect on the same thing I did. Helping you figure out if you're ready to meet your person or if you need a little bit more time.

It'll help you discern whether it's time to put yourself out there or time to focus inward for a little bit longer. But that's not all. You'll also walk away with practical steps you can take today to powerfully invest, both in your life right now and in your future marriage before it even starts.

Again this question and the journey it led me on changed so much for me. And I'm praying that this is just as powerful in your life as it was in mine. The quiz is free and you can pick it up at Stephaniemaywilson.com/fhq. That stands for "future husband quiz." Again that stephaniemaywilson.com/fhq.

Hi friends! With that said, let's jump into the episode. Here is my conversation with Shauna Niequist.

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Stephanie: All right friends, I am so excited for what we are doing today. I am sitting here with my new friend, author, Shauna Niequist. Shauna, thank you so much for coming on Girls Night.

Shauna: Oh, it's totally my pleasure. Thanks for having me.

Stephanie: Shauna, for women who haven't gotten to meet you yet, can you tell us who you are, what you do, and a fun fact about yourself?

Shauna: So I am a writer. I've been a writer for almost 20 years. And I'm a writer because I'm a reader. I'm a total bookworm. That's my favorite thing in the world. I live in New York City. I have two boys. I'm married to Aaron.

A fun fact about me is that I think the greatest technology—I was just telling someone this—the greatest technology of our generation is the Kindle, that I can have all my books in one place. That makes me so happy.

Stephanie: Yeah, I love that. Before we dive in, I need to tell you kind of what's happening on my side of the conversation. One, I have 15-month-old twins who are sleeping next door-

Shauna: Amazing.

Stephanie: ...and they are sick. Our babysitter's here. She's amazing. But you might hear some really snotty, sad kiddos next door.

Shauna: Oh, I'm sorry.

Stephanie: If you guys hear anything, that's what's happening. The other thing that is happening is, Shauna, I have to tell you, you are my favorite writer of all time. You're my favorite writer. So to have you on the show is an enormous honor. I wanted to tell you I first came across your books about 10 years ago, or across your writing. It was right before I left on a year-long church traveling around the world.

Someone told me about your books and they said, "You need to read this author. She has a way of capturing your heart and putting it in a book and you're going to love her." And it's true. So I bought a copy of *Cold Tangerines* and *Bittersweet*. And I had a 50-pound backpack and all of my possessions for the year had to fit in that backpack so I brought Kindle with all the books that I needed on it. But I did bring physical copies of *Cold Tangerines* and *Bittersweet*. They're the only physical books I brought with me. So my copies are truly tattered. So you have been such an inspiration to me as a writer, and also just a really wonderful big sister to me throughout the years. And so I just am really grateful for you.

Shauna: Oh, my gosh, that is so meaningful to me. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Stephanie: So you guys, if you feel like, Uh, well, Stephanie is a little nervous, now you know why. To dive in, you have a new book coming out called *I Guess I Haven't Learned That Yet: Discovering New Ways of Living When the Old Ways Stop Working*. And I know that before a book can be written, it has to be lived. So can you just tell us about the season of life that inspired you to write this book?

Shauna: So, I've always committed as a writer. I approach each topic as not what do I think other people need to learn about, but instead, what do I need to learn about. So

what is the thing that I want to explore? What is the thing that needs to be kind of healed up and addressed in my own life?

It was really obvious this time around. We moved from the Midwest to Manhattan. And before we moved, we had a really difficult couple years trying to figure out where we fit in the world, where we fit in a church community, where we fit with our friends, how to make it through some of the hard transitions of midlife and a changing faith in a changing family landscape.

So it felt like we were sort of lost. And then even we made this big move and we still felt lost in some ways, and we felt very overwhelmed by city life. Then I had some pretty serious health problems. Health problems are hard enough when you have a family doctor that you've been going to forever. But when you're trying to figure that out in the middle of a new city, that's hard to.

And so it felt like sort of cascading changes and challenges where you just barely get through one and there's a whole set of other ones. That's what was real in my life at the time. So it felt like the only honest thing to write about was about those changes.

And then at the very same time, it felt like, oh my gosh, I'm not alone. Everybody I'm talking to is certainly in terms of a global pandemic, but also in terms of the way the church is changing and our culture is changing, I don't think I'm the only one who feels overwhelmed by the amount of change that they're weathering in their life right now. So it's essentially a collection of essays about change, loss, curiosity, starting over, getting it wrong, making it right.

I never approached books as an expert. I always speak as a friend, as a fellow journeyer, as a person who's asking all the same questions. But I think this one even more than the others is like, Hey, guys, I don't know the answers here. I just have a lot of questions. And we can sit together while we ask them together.

Stephanie: Yeah, yeah. Knowing that you're not alone in the questions, knowing that you're not alone in anything, it just makes everything better. It just makes everything better.

I know that this idea of remaking your life has been really important to you at several moments throughout your life. You've written about it a couple times. And I think for a lot of us, you know, we're speeding down this road in our lives, and it feels like it might be too late to remake them.

So I want to hear from you. Can you talk us through this? Is it too late? And if it's not, how do we know when we need to stop and reconfigure a few things?

Shauna: I would say categorically if you're still alive, it's not too late, really. And that sounds like a cliché that we say sometimes. But every choice you make, you're making your life, you're telling the world who you are, you're shaping your future. Even if you're making the same choice over and over again, that's a way of choosing right.

So as long as you're still making choices, which all of us are, you can make new choices. You're never too old. One of the things that's been really exciting to me about this season is I've been talking with a lot of people and saying, Listen, probably ostensibly my biggest life change is in my mid-40s. So many people have been like, "Oh, hang on. I was 65. I was 70. I was 75."

It's so inspiring to realize that the cement is still it for all of us. We can remake our lives. And so the first part of your question, it's never too late.

The other thing is I have an old friend who used to say: most of us never change unless the pain level gets high enough. It's easier to stay on the same path. But I would say one of the things that writing has really helped me with, being a writer means being a person who pays attention, being a noticer. It's really the heart of it.

And because I've committed as kind of a lifestyle to being a writer, I've had to pay attention to the increasing pain levels in various areas of my life. And even now when people ask me, I always tell women, especially, if you want to start journaling, start with the questions of pain and desire. What hurts and what do you want? Those are questions that a lot of women are told not to ask. Don't pay attention to the pain-

Stephanie: Yeah. I was going to say those are pretty hard.

Shauna: Right?

Stephanie: Yeah.

Shauna: Those are hard questions. If you were to say, I just want to check in with myself, I want to see how I'm doing, I want to see if I'm on track, spend seven mornings, the next seven mornings, and ask yourself about pain and about desire. And I think you'll find out some things about yourself that maybe you haven't been willing to face yet. That's a good starting point.

Stephanie: I love that. I love that. Those really are kind of audacious questions for us to ask as women. They're questions that I think we spend a lot of time maybe being taught or there's some sort of, I don't know, I think it's like in the water that we shouldn't, I don't know, we should tamp down the things that we want or tamp down the things that that are painful. I really love that.

As we're looking at our lives, you know, I know one of the things that you have been talking about lately is identifying the things that no longer serve you. How do we do this? And then how do we go about letting them go?

Shauna: I think it starts with those questions about pain and desire. And I think you find them first through solitude. And then through really trusted people in your life: a really good therapist, a best friend, a mom, or a sister, your husband or partner.

A lot of times I think if you can start first with your own self, "this is what I'm sensing, this is what I want. This is what hurts, right?" Get comfortable saying those things to yourself. And then run it by a couple people who you really trust and see how they respond to it. And most likely, they'll be like, "Oh, I've just been waiting for you to start talking about this in your own life. I've been watching you carry this really heavy thing and you're ready to lay it down, and I can't wait to help you."

And then the next step is taking action. And it's hard. When I look back over my life, I have almost always acted too late. I've held on too long. I've tried to keep reviving things that were dead. So I hope in the next several seasons of my life I'm better at seeing what needs to end and letting it end. That's not something I've been great at historically.

Stephanie: I can relate to that for sure. What kinds of categories of things can we decide aren't serving us? Does that make sense?

Shauna: Oh, absolutely. Well, I mean, I'd say all of them, but specifically a couple that I've had to really look at. I've had to look at friendships. A friend of mine was just talking to me about this. He's kind of a mentor in my life. He was saying, "When was the last time you did a full relational inventory?" I was like, I don't know what you're talking about.

He said he spent some time in his life going through all of his key relationships and really asking himself, "Is this a person whose presence makes my life better? Do I

admire them? Do I want to be more like them? Do I feel more like myself when we've spent time together?"

And then certainly there are some friendships that we're not always gaining things from. But do I feel committed to serving this person in this season? Do I feel committed to helping them in a season of pain? That can be a very valid friendship for some seasons.

But he said it was really good to just look at the whole landscape and say, Essentially, I deserve to have people in my life who make my life better. And I only want to give my energy to people who are giving that same kind of good energy back to me.

Again, we all have hard seasons where we need to be carried, or when we're in a lot of need, and that that's a separate thing. But in terms of long, close friendships, there should be a good give and take, a good mutuality, a good reciprocity. And a lot of us don't take a close enough look at our friendships often enough to realize that that's not happening. So that's just one example.

How is it looking in your friendship life? Another example would be the work that you do. Another example would be the way that you take care of your body. Another would be the home that you live in and the town that you live in.

These are not default choices. We get to decide how we want to live. And it's worth going through kind of turning over every stone and saying, "Is this still the life that I think is the best one for me? Because it's okay to make a change.

Stephanie: I love that. I feel like we just need to sit with that for a second. In the same vein, one of the things that you've talked about a lot for years is this concept of yes and no. The things that you say yes to and then things that you say no to, setting some boundaries in your life.

I'd love to know what this looks like in your life right now. Like, what are some things that you're saying yes to and some things you're saying no to? And then as you look over the last, I don't know, pick a number of years, 20 years, something like that, what are some things that you wish you would have known sooner about saying yes and saying no?

Shauna: Well, the first answer that comes to mind is kind of a fun one. So, for a long season of my life, kind of the *Present Over Perfect* season, a lot of that book was about working too much and being gone too much, and wanting to focus more closely

and more narrowly on kind of my people, my family, my home. And that was right for that time.

And then we moved to a new city and then there was a global pandemic. And then I had to finish a book. So there were all these sort of restrictions that made my life and all of our lives a little pretty quiet. And then I finished the book. And things started opening up around New York.

One of the things I get to say yes to right now is new friends. Aaron keeps joking with me. He's like, "Your social life is bonkers right now." I met a writer friend and I went out to her neighborhood in Brooklyn, and we had drinks together. We talked about books and we had a great time.

And I had another friend who she writes a column and she was reviewing a restaurant. She took me along as her plus one. And to get to engage in new friendships has been really exciting for me, to get to know new people. I'm naturally an outgoing person, an extroverted person, and it's been really fun for me in this season to get to say yes to some new friendships.

Whereas in other seasons, I haven't been able to do that. My kids have needed more or the book has needed more. But in this season, that's been a really fun yes to be able to say.

Stephanie: I love that. I love that. So then overall or looking back, what are a couple of key bumpers that you've kind of bumped into enough that you're like, "I wish maybe I knew," or "this was an important one to learn"?

Shauna: I mean certainly putting appropriate kind of bumpers or brakes on my work life was one of the most transformational, most significant changes I ever made. And I still keep having to make adjustments, of course, but I'll never go back to the way of working and living that I was doing in my early to mid-30s. That wasn't right for me. It wasn't right for my marriage. It wasn't right for my parenting. It wasn't right for my values.

I know you know some about this in your own career. Nobody else is going to keep those boundaries for you. It's a publisher's job, it's an event planner's job, it's a marketing person's job to give you more and more and more and more opportunities. It's not their job to keep track of how much you're working. They're going to keep asking. And that's good. Those are good opportunities.

It's your job to put on the brakes, to put up the bumpers, to build the boundaries. No one's ever going to do that for you. So I learned very much the hard way how important that is. Now I don't mess around with that anymore. I mean, every once in a while, things will get a little too busy, but I learned that in such a deep way that I'm not going back anytime soon. Does that make sense?

Stephanie: Yeah. How do you know? How do you decide where those bumpers lie? Is there sort of a trigger in your head that says, this is too much? Or is it like, I will only do this many things a day or a week? How do you regulate that?

Shauna: For me, I've never been great at like I'm a hard rules. Like, "I only do this." Some people are like, "I travel twice a month. It doesn't matter what that third thing is, I never do it." That has never worked for me.

For me, it's more like a rhythm of addition and subtraction. So let's say I say, As a general guideline, I'm only going to travel twice a month. But then the third thing comes up and it's just amazing. And it's like center of the target, something I really care about, it's something I want to do. Okay, so I'm going to do it. But I'm going to clear the next month or I'm going to schedule an extra day on either side with my family.

It's a little more fluid than that. And a lot of it comes down to paying attention real-time and not committing too far out in advance. Like there was a time where I was booked out almost two years. Especially with kids, that doesn't work, right? In two years your kids are completely different people. You don't know what your life is going to look like then.

So I've worked really hard to stay as much in one school year as possible and to pay attention all the way through to how it feels. Check in with my kids, check in with my husband, check in with my close friends, so that it can never get that far away from you.

If you're always checking in and you're always making small adjustments, you can kind of stay closer to that healthy zone as opposed to like, "Well, two years from now I'll do a little assessment with a life coach." I mean, two years from now, who are you going to be? So to set that regular check-in time with your closest people I think keeps you closer to the center with small adjustments. That's really helpful. I like that. I like that a lot.

Stephanie: At the end of last year, there was just sort of a brief moment where the world felt sort of safe enough to venture out. And so we had a couple of things back to back.

It felt like our suitcases were always packed and you're always doing 10,000 things. It was stressful for me and my husband was stressed and the girls were... I mean, they were fine. They don't know where we're going. But it was wild.

So at the end of last year, I really sat down and was like, We need two weeks in between houseguests and we need three weeks between trips. The pace of life that we used to keep just doesn't work when you have toddlers coming along with you. We just can't do it like that anymore.

Shauna: Oh, absolutely. And even when I look back on it, I did... It never feels like this at the time, but your girls will not remember these trips. Right?

Stephanie: Yeah.

Shauna: So, when I look back, I'm like, "Why didn't we just stay home?" Now our kids are 10 and 15. They love to travel. It's exciting for them. It's fun to do together. But I look back and I wish that we would have kept things much more quiet and much closer to home during those little years. It's hard to travel with toddlers. I wish I would have felt the freedom to say, "There's going to be a coming season where it's easy to travel but this isn't it." For what that's worth.

Stephanie: Like, is there?

Shauna: Oh, yeah, 100%.

Stephanie: Well, people say that the earlier you start the better they'll be later or something.

Shauna: Not with toddlers. Categorically not with toddlers. No! They're not. It's not like your 15-month-old is in training to carry her own passport through customs next time. Do you know what I mean? The toddler season, when I look back on it, I wish I would have just had a room full of brightly colored toys and sat on the floor for three years. I took them so many places that I'm not sure why, you know.

Especially because now we travel with our kids all the time. So I would say like maybe when they're six or seven is when you can start building those patterns. That is when they can learn to eat all kinds of different foods or sleep anywhere or carry their own backpack. But like before five, I don't know that you're instilling any patterns that are going to be useful for the future.

You might take them with you because it's fun for you. But you can start the training thing at like six or seven, I would say. I'm not an expert. But in my mind, I would say.

Stephanie: That's really helpful. I mean, we have a giant room full of brightly colored toys next door and I spend a lot of time just sitting on the floor. But that's good to know that we're not ruining them for future travel by not doing more.

Shauna: Oh, not at all. No. I don't think so at all.

Stephanie: I really like that. I'm trying to decide which one of these questions I'm going to ask first. Let's go celebration. So this is kind of a throwback. But at the beginning of *Cold Tangerines*, you talk about the importance of celebration even and especially when life feels the heaviest.

I would love, especially right now, the world has been... I keep wanting to say the world is crazy. It is. It also has been crazy for basically as long as I can remember at this point. How do we do that? How do we still celebrate even now? How do we not feel insensitive about it?

Shauna: I think it comes down to a couple different things. And it's a great question. The first thing I think of is the Jesus words: Rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn.

So we're not saying your friend whose family member is in the hospital because of COVID we should invite them to our fun fancy party with balloons. That's not what we're saying. What we're saying is you bring that person a meal and you pray with them, and you sit with them and you cry with them, and you text every day to see how their mom is doing.

And then, at the very same time, your friend who has been desperate to get pregnant for ages and ages finally is having a healthy pregnancy and you throw a crazy party for her because you rejoice with what she's rejoicing over.

You're exactly right. It's tone-deaf and insensitive to push people to celebrate when they're in a season of great mourning. But it's also not right to not celebrate the things that we've been longing for ages that are finally coming to fruition in our lives.

A friend of mine is, let's say seven months sober. And every month he celebrates, and we celebrate. And there are other hard things going on in the world, but we

drop everything to cheer him on and say, "I see you. I see your accomplishment, and I see the health and wholeness in your life." And so I think it's not all celebration or none. I think it's about how we do it and what we choose to celebrate.

Stephanie: I love that. Like just like it's not right to push into celebration in times of mourning or people who are mourning. It's also not right to ignore moments of celebration because they really matter also.

Shauna: Absolutely. There are milestones. One of the things that was I think so genuinely painful about the long stretch of the quarantine and lockdown is how many really meaningful milestones we didn't get to mark together. Kids graduating and going to prom or choosing a college or-

Stephanie: My parents never saw me pregnant ever.

Shauna: Yeah. The fact that we missed doing those things together. That's not right. That's not our communities at their best. So I think whatever we can reclaim in terms of celebrating what's good, it doesn't negate the many, many painful things that are happening. But it's an important stake in the ground that says, good is still emerging.

Stephanie: I love that. I love that. I know that we are, in life hopefully, on a constant journey towards becoming the healthiest, most whole versions of ourselves. When you look back over the last, again, pick an amount of time, 20 years, something like that, what are some of the things that you have done for yourself that have been the most impactful towards becoming like the healthiest, most whole version of yourself?

Shauna: The two first things that come to mind are time with a really good therapist and slowing my life down enough to have the margin to think and feel and rest in good ways. Those two things have changed everything. And I haven't always done them well. But when I have those are the two of the things that have yielded the most growth and health in my life.

And they go together. There have been seasons in my life where I've had pretty good therapist, but I come flying in, two months before the appointment, I go running out the second it's over. I don't take a second to process it. I go to bed too late, I wake up too early. At a certain point, I don't know how helpful that is, right?

If your lifestyle doesn't allow for you to really soak in the enormity of the work you're doing with that therapist, it can't be super impactful. So the two have to go together. We all have, I think, a set of vulnerabilities or bad habits that we'll default

to. And mine is always going to be going too fast. Whether it's with work stuff or with fun stuff or travel, I'll keep myself too busy to think and feel on a deep level. And so when I'm able to slow down, that always yields the most growth and the most health in my life.

[00:29:07] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! I wanted to take a quick pause from my conversation with Shauna to thank our sponsors for today. Our first sponsor for today's episode is an amazing company called [Prose](#). Now, most of you have probably heard me sing the praises of Prose, the world's most personalized hair care.

For those who haven't, I wanted to tell you about the incredible results I'm seeing since using my customized Prose products. Prose has given over 1 million consultations with their hair quiz and that's how the process started for me. The quiz was so much fun. It felt like one of those magazine quizzes I used to love. It was easy but also really in-depth.

They asked me so many questions that I wouldn't have thought to answer. Like, how much is your hair shed? Or is your hair oily? The ends are just near your scalp? So I did the hair quiz that I placed my order. In just a few days later, the package showed up on my doorstep. I ordered a pre-shampoo mask, shampoo, and conditioner.

I've been using the products for a while now and it has made such a difference. My hair feels silky and soft. It looks even shinier. And the other thing I really like is that you can continuously customize your formula. They'll help you tweak things depending on your lifestyle changes or even changes in the weather.

Prose is also focused on providing clean and responsible products. Every product is free of parabens, sulfates, phthalates, mineral oils, GMOs and is always cruelty-free. Also, if you're not 100% positive that Prose is the best haircare you've ever had, they will take the products back. No questions asked. But I have a feeling that won't be an issue for you.

Friends, Prose is the healthy hair regimen with your name all over it. You can take your free in-depth hair quiz and get 15% off your first order today. Just go to prose.com/girlsnight. That's prose.com/girlsnight for your free in-depth hair quiz and 15% off. Prose thanks so much for sponsoring our Girls Night.

Sponsor: Our second sponsor for today's episode is another company I love. And it's [Green Chef](#). As you guys aren't familiar with them, Green Chef is the number one meal kit for eating well with plans to fit every lifestyle.

If you guys have been around our Girls Nights for a while, you know two things about me. The first thing is my schedule is busy. And I know yours is too. The second thing is that I'm not a great cook. Truly I'm pretty bad at it and I don't enjoy it either. Don't get me wrong. I love food and I love eating great food. I'm just not the best at making it for myself. And that's why I love Green Chef.

Each week Green Chef sends out meals with fresh produce, premium proteins, and organic ingredients that you can feel good about eating. Everything is handpicked and delivered right to your door. The ingredients are pre-measured, perfectly portioned, and mostly prepped, and they have options for every lifestyle including vegan, vegetarian, and gluten-free.

Carl and I recently made the roasted curry pork chops and they were amazing. The creamy coconut yogurt sauce we drizzled on top was incredible. I'm still thinking about it. Guys, I love what Green Chef is doing because they take over the meal planning, the grocery shopping, and most of the prep for us week after week.

If you go to greenchef.com/girlsnight130 and use the code GIRLSNIGHT130, you can get \$130 off plus free shipping. I'm going to say that again just to make sure you have all the info. If you go to greenchef.com/girlsnight130 and use code GIRLSNIGHT130, you can get \$130 off plus free shipping. Thank you so much to Green Chef for sponsoring our Girls Night. We just love having you.

All right, now without any further ado, let's jump back in my conversation with Shauna.

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Stephanie: I know that this question is going to be really familiar to you because there's just no way you haven't asked it a million times or wrestled with it a million times? Because I definitely know I have. What do you tell yourself when you're afraid that you're going to miss something? Like when you're slowing down and saying no to things, whether it's work stuff or social stuff, how do you quiet that fear of being left behind or straight up FOMO?

Shauna: I mean, I totally feel it, and I get it wrong a lot of the time. For me, it comes down sort of to the law of diminishing returns. If I'm too tired, if I'm too frantic, if I'm too

kind of spun out on busyness, I don't enjoy the good things in my life. And so saying yes to that thing, I won't even really be there for that thing.

I won't even really get to taste and feel that thing because I'm so kind of spun out on busyness. So if I can discipline myself to get good sleep, to get good quiet time, to walk, to get good writing done, to connect in meaningful one on one ways with the people in my life, that's when I really start to like taste and feel and experience the goodness of my life. And that's really worth it to me. So I try to hang on to that.

And then the other thing in terms of work, I always remind myself that I'm playing the long game. So like right now, it's very easy to think like everything's on the line for this book release. No, it's not. There'll be another book and another book and another book.

This is what I want to do forever. And I'm not going to compromise my health, my marriage, my parenting life, my best friendships for this moment because I'm playing a longer game at that. I want to be a healthy, thriving wise person with every next book and next book and next book. And that's what I've invested in, not just this moment right here.

Stephanie: That is so good. I need to rewind, replay, rewind, replay because it's so contrary to what, I don't know, everything in the world... It's so hard to not feel that way. That like this is the only time that this or this is the moment that you have to seize the moment. The long game. That's-

Professionally, it's true. There are things you will miss out on if you say no to them. And other people will get those opportunities. I mean, I had people tell me very specifically like, "If you don't have a book in this catalog, we're going to give a book deal to some other lady, and she's going to sell books instead." And I'm like, "I will buy it. Good for her." There's space for all of us.

You know, if you say yes to this tour, "I'm going to book somebody else to speak in your place." I'm like, "Yeah, I know, that's the point, that someone else can do this." There are more than enough books, more than enough speakers, more than enough podcasts. It doesn't all hang on me.

I'm trying to be more than just a product, I'm trying to be a whole person over decades. And so when I keep that in mind long term, it helps me say no with a lot of freedom and confidence that this wasn't the thing that was going to change everything. This was one of the things and there will be other things.

Stephanie: To do the work that you do, and the kind of work that I want to be doing, it's not helpful to anybody if we've sacrificed everything good about us and all of... Like, without your health, without your mind working its best way, without your connection to God and your people and stuff, it's like you don't have anything good to say. And so if you spend it all on... Maybe this book launch is great, but everything for the future has been compromised.

Shauna: That's absolutely true. I mean, there were points when I would say to people on my publishing team, they wanted another book and another book and another this. I was like, "Listen, I have been wearing a microphone for like 18 months. I've been on a stage or in a green room or on a plane or in a hotel. I need to learn some things. You need to give me some time to have something to say because I've been talking for 18 months, and that does not make a good book. That doesn't even make a good human.

I need to be quiet, and I need to listen and I need to learn. And only then will there be something valuable for me to write or speak. But that image of farming, of leaving a field fallow, of letting there be a season for things to be quiet.

I hate to use words like content creators. But again, you know, as writers, as people who make or produce or say anything, the expectation that we are an unlimited well that produces on command, it's just not true. We have to tend lovingly to ourselves, and we have to be quiet enough to learn and listen in order to have something to say long-term.

Stephanie: I love that so much. I mean, Instagram is a really big struggle for me, because the lessons that I'm learning don't happen in bite-sized chunks every single day on command. And then also they don't tend to fit in a caption. It's always bigger than that and messier than that.

Honestly, that's why I love podcasting because it just leaves so much more room for good things. But yeah, the best lessons in life don't happen 300 characters at a time, every single day.

Shauna: And the reverse is true. If every single kind of rich moment in your life goes on Instagram, you're never going to write a book. Like not ever. If we give away little pieces of our story over and over and over real-time because of pressure, because of this...

What I love about a book is it's a long journey together. You're going to get to know me and you're going to settle in and you're going to like some parts and not like

other parts. And that's a more meaningful connection to me than liking this post or this story. Those bite-sized chunks, they end up not being... You never get a full meal. They're good for what they are but you can't expect to feel truly nourished in a long term way

Stephanie: It costs something to make it. Sort of like the idea of you get out what you put in. But you get a couple bites, you get an appetizer, but it's not-

Shauna: And I would say different people are good at those different formats. And that's good. Bless them. There are some people who are absolutely best at delivering their best content via Instagram. Good for them. And for some people is podcasts, and for some people it's books. And figuring that out about yourself and then giving yourself the freedom to put less energy into those other things is really important.

I have a couple friends who love speaking tours. Like they love it. They can't wait to get back on stage. And that's not true for me. So I cheer them on when they do it and they cheer me on for staying home because what's right for them doesn't have to be what's right for me.

Stephanie: I feel like we should all tattoo that to our foreheads. So this is a giant conversation but one of the things that I know you talk about in this new book is crying in church. I know that there have been some shifts and changes in your faith in this last season. And I think that a lot of us are finding ourselves in that place. Our relationship with God doesn't feel maybe like it used to, or maybe more accurately our relationship with the church.

And so I would love to know, just as much as you can share, what that looks like for you, and what you've been learning, and just anything that's helped you navigate through it.

Shauna: Well, I think one of the most important things to keep in mind is that when your faith starts to shift, that's not a failure on your part. That's how it's supposed to be. If you said to me, I've been married for 20 years, and in the last 10 years, we've done everything the same over and over again. Don't worry, we haven't read a book about it, we haven't been to a therapist, we haven't been to a retreat, we just do the same thing all the time, you'd be like, that sounds insane, right?

But we sometimes expect all these other parts of our lives can change and grow and expand and progress, but not our faith. It has to get cemented in when you're six years old, and then look exactly the same all the way through. I don't think that

makes sense. I don't think it's how humans work. I don't think it's how the human heart works. I don't think it's the pattern we necessarily see in Scripture.

So I think if we could normalize the idea of our faith shifting and progressing the same way our bodies do and our minds do and our marriages do and our best friendships do, I think that would be really healthy for us. So it's not so scary when one edge needs to be addressed or there's one thing we need to leave behind.

I think also to say, there's not one perfect kind of church for all of us and there's not one perfect kind of church for all of us for all of our lives. It's not wrong to grow up in a particular tradition and then be a part of a little bit different one in your 20s and 30s, and then feel like in your 40s and 50s, you're ready for something even a little bit different. Those aren't failures on your part or on the part of the churches you've been a part of. It's okay to need and want and gravitate toward different things in different seasons.

I grew up in a large church, and I loved it. It was all I knew that made total sense to me, that sort of felt normal to me. And now we go to a really small church, and I love it. And it's not better or worse, it's just really different. And it's right for me right now.

And I think to give ourselves and one another the freedom to say what I needed then is different than what I need now. And maybe what you need is different than what I need. It's okay to go to a big church or a small church or a very traditional church or a very progressive church. It's okay to stay home sometimes. It's okay to read outside of your tradition. It's okay to have church with your three best friends and a worship album.

Like there are so many right ways to interact with our faith experiences. And I think the more we can reassure each other that God is big enough for all of those questions and all of the changes and all of the shifts. It's not something you have to be afraid of. It's a transformation that can really bring health and growth and healing.

Stephanie: Yeah, I like that. Have you had any moments where it's been hard for you to separate who God is and who Jesus is from who sometimes the church culture makes them out to be? Is there anything that's helped you navigate that recently?

Shauna: Well, I would say, one of the reasons I continue to choose to be a Christian, to choose to be devoted to my faith, to choose to grow and pray and confess and sing is because I don't confuse the two. Sometimes I ask big questions like, has it ever

been this bad? Has a tradition ever kind of showed its flaws and cracks and limitations as directly as our tradition is showing right now?

And some of my older friends are like, yes, every generation this is how it works for there to be a very human, very flawed institution like the church. But also it feels pretty extreme to me. It feels like we're pretty far off course in a lot of areas. In terms of the wider American Evangelical Church, we have a lot that needs to change and needs to die and needs to get made right and that needs to be repented of a lot.

For me, I have to start every one of those conversations by saying, I do not blame God for that, I blame humans. This is what we have done. This is a human flawed institution. And a lot of people are doing their best and still getting it wrong. It's not necessarily about blame. But I know that this was not God's work. I know that He did not make mistakes in His church or in our world or in the culture. I know that this is about human failing. And those two things are really different to me.

And I think it's easy to want a church to be absolutely everything. I think when Aaron and I... Our first couple big ministry experiences out of college, we moved away from our hometown. We were part of another church for a while. We were on kind of like the senior staff, like, who let us be on the senior staff.

That was where we had to realize, Oh, this is just human people doing their best. And we do not get it right every time. It really gave us a good perspective on how I think an appropriate lowering of expectations for what it can be because it's just a bunch...

It's like when you go to a Broadway show, and sometimes it's just so much greater than the sum of its parts. And it's like some sort of magic and alchemy and how did this happen? And other times you're like, "That's just six people standing there, isn't it? This is not happening. But not for lack of trying.

So I think to have relatively low expectations for what can happen with a group of humans is pretty good. That's not the same thing as making excuses for or dismissing the really sinful parts of the church. That's not what I'm saying at all.

It's two different things. On one hand, it's going to be a mess, because it's human people who are flawed, who are doing their best, who are getting it wrong. And then also there's a lot that's just plain wrong that we don't make excuses for, that we don't put under the rug of like, Oh, humanity. There's a lot that needs to be corrected and changed. But I tend to think giving up on it doesn't make it better.

Certainly, if you've been wounded by a particular church, I would never tell you to soldier on in that place. If those relationships have been broken, if you've been treated poorly, if you're carrying a lot of pain or trauma from that place, absolutely give yourself the gift of finding a new place.

I love being a volunteer in our church right now. I'm not a staff member. I do little jobs that they ask me to do occasionally, and I love it. And it's wonderful and imperfect and made of humans. And I believe in it more than I believe in any other possible alternative. I'd rather be a part of building this than staying home and talking about what's wrong with everything. And that's not true for everybody. I'm not saying everyone has to do it that way. But that's what works for me right now.

Stephanie: I really like that. I didn't grow up in the church. I became a Christian when I was like 21. And so I missed out on all of the... I don't know, there are things like my husband and my friends will tell me about it, I'm like, "You guys listen to what? You guys wore T shirts that said what? Like this is bonkers."

But I've been in it long enough to pick up some things that... I haven't had really bad church experiences personally, thankfully. I know a lot of people have. But also there's a wide variety of experiences. But I feel like my daily work has been reminding myself that like, This is people; this isn't God. That was not what he was talking about. That was not the plan. But sometimes the messier it gets, the harder that work gets.

Shauna: Absolutely. I one thing that has really helped me, Aaron and I went... It was our 20th wedding anniversary, and we went to Rome. And it was amazing. Just like a magic trip. But one of the things we did is we spent a day in the Vatican City and going to St. Peter's.

We did a guided tour. And the woman who was leading was so smart and just amazing. But when you hear about Pope's from the 1400s and the religious system as it was at that time, and all of these buildings and all the corruption and all the money and stuff, it's really easy to look at them and be like, they were pretty far off track. And they were. But it helps you realize we all are. Every generation is, right?

Stephanie: Yeah.

Shauna: Our generation is not unique in being off track. And theirs wasn't unique. But this is what humans do over and over. Sometimes we do better and sometimes we do worse. But the rule is, generally we haven't gotten this right yet. But it gave us a

little bit of grace for we're kind of a mess, but so were they and so was the generation before that and so will the next generation. We're just going to do our best in little daily ways.

Stephanie: I like that. This is a total sidebar and then we can get back on track. But actually, I was studying abroad my junior year of college and in just a totally lost season of life. We were studying in Spain. We had a little spring break in Italy and we were in Rome and I walked into the Sistine Chapel one morning, I was hungover and wearing a pub crawl t-shirt. And that's where I became a Christian. I met Jesus in there.

Shauna: You're kidding.

Stephanie: Mm-mm. Isn't that wild?

Shauna: That's amazing.

Stephanie: I turned around and saw the Last Judgment, which is not my favorite piece of art ever at all. But something about it. It just wasn't a painting. I just felt like I locked eyes with Jesus. And I was like, "I want to know Him." And that was a totally wild thought for me because I had so many things that I didn't understand about Christians at the time. But I just like, "I want to know Him." And that was probably 12 years ago, something like that.

Shauna: Oh, that I love. Thank you for telling me that story.

Stephanie: When you said Rome, I was like, yeah.

Shauna: And that sort of, in some ways, speaks to this larger conversation. Like, the whole process of making the Sistine Chapel was not particularly... It was about competition and money and showing up other Popes. The artists didn't want to do it and it was blah, blah, blah. It was very human, right? It was kind of a mess. And yet, it was a conduit for the Spirit of God to speak to your own heart all these years later, both are true, right?

Stephanie: Yeah.

Shauna: That's really beautiful to me.

Stephanie: Yeah, me too. Me too. As we're sitting here, I'm about 10 years into my career as an author and a podcaster. And I would love to know... Maybe it's one of the things

that we've already talked about, but if there's anything that you wish you could go back and tell yourself, at this point in your career, anything that maybe would have helped you walk into like the next 10 well?

Shauna: I think a lot of what we've talked about is about being willing to say no. And I think that's one of the biggest things. Again, there will always be opportunities, invitations, pressure, timelines. Nobody else is going to put the brakes on that except you.

They're going to ask and ask and ask and ask. And that's good. It's great to have opportunities. You're the one that's responsible for the pace of your own life and your family life and your marriage and your friends and how you want to build a life. You're the one that has to keep doing the math on that. Nobody else will. It's not their job.

The other thing I would say is there's a lot of pressure to be sort of extremely well defined. Almost like a mood board. Like, "This is Stephanie and she likes this, and she does this and she's known for dot, dot, dot." And we're not mood boards. We're not products. We're not marketing campaigns. We're like cookie human people who love some things, and not other things and who change and who sometimes love this and then the next season love that.

And so I would say fight hard to retain your quirky humanity and don't let your edges get too polished off. At a certain point, I felt like, Am I starting to look like all my writer friends? Do we all look the same? Do we all dress the same? Are our book covers the same?

There's like a little machine that you start to go through that this is what looks good on stage. This is what looks good on a book cover. This is what looks good on a conference brochure. I don't think that's good for us. I think to fight for who exactly you are, that's the way through this.

And then the last thing I would say is long game. Who do you want to be when you're 75 or 80? A friend of mine, who's like my parenting guru, one of the things she says is, when you have kids, every decision you make, the question you're asking is, what will help them become an independent, healthy adult? Right? Every question, that's the real question.

So there's a 15-month-old version of that, there's a 5-year-old version of that, there's a 15-year-old version of that. But you're always you always have the same end goal. Healthy independent adults. And I think the same kind of the professional

version of that is, who do I want to be when I'm at professionally. What do I want to have made? What do I want to have built? What do I want to do little by little every year, every decade to get to that place?

Make decisions from there, never from the hysteria of the publishing cycle or the conference schedule or the whatever. Play the long game.

Stephanie: I love that so much. So you might have just answered this last one. But these last several questions are super selfish. But you know what, you guys, welcome. This is my show. We're doing it. As you know, I'm a new mom. I would love to know what a couple things are that you wish you could go back and tell yourself kind of as a new mom.

Shauna: As a new mum?

Stephanie: Yeah.

Shauna: Well, number one, I would not have taken my toddlers as many places. And we talked about this really. Toddlers have their best environments. And I would have kept them more often in those environments. I think we were some of those parents that we were like, "They just come with us everywhere. They don't cramp our style at all." Until then you're on an international flight with a toddler, and you're like, "Oh, no, he's cramping everyone's style." But I would say-

Stephanie: We are totally planning on being those people. Like, no, no, we'll just be our full selves and they'll get to come along, and it will make them really cool adults. And then we had two and we were like, Yeah, we just skipped right over being the low key. We have a kid with us people. We are like full family bus status distinctly.

Shauna: Absolutely. As you should be. Do it the way that your family reality is inviting you... Accept what your family reality is, and make choices based on that. And I think I pushed too hard to be like, "No, this will be fine. This seems fine." Well, it wasn't we should have slowed down.

But the biggest thing I would say, and this isn't necessarily something I would go back and do differently. I think in seasons we've done it reasonably well. But this is my favorite piece of parenting advice. There's a child psychologist named Wendy Mogel. She's my number one favorite. She wrote a book called *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee*. I've given out probably 100 copies.

And I saw her speak at Lincoln Center, and she said, "I've been seeing parents and kids for three decades. Parents are always worried, kids are generally fine." And this is the piece of advice I give to every parent. So the number one piece of advice: be enchanted by whatever is enchanting your child. I love that so much.

We have two boys, they're 10 and 15. It means I watch a lot of movies, I watch a lot of Marvel movies. I talk a lot about Pokémon. I go to dinners where they only serve like burgers and milkshakes and grilled cheese. Like to invest myself in what they're invested in I think is always really worthwhile. So that's my number one piece of parenting advice.

Stephanie: I love that. I love that. Okay, last but not least. What is something, whatever comes to mind, that you want every woman in their late 20s and early 30s to know?

Shauna: Oh, okay. So the first thing that comes to mind is you are so much more beautiful than you think. This is true. This is 100% true, because now I kind of have an old face, you know, because I'm 45. And that's okay. I don't feel bad about it. But when I look back at pictures, and like, "Oh, my skin was so beautiful. Oh my..." But you don't know at the time. You don't appreciate it at the time. I wish I could go back to her and be like, "You look pretty spectacular". Or at least like upper 50%. Like, stop worrying, you're doing fine.

The other thing is that, and this is a little bit more serious. I write about it on the book. I struggled with my weight and my appearance and my body over and over through various seasons. And then these last couple years it's been like challenge level 100. Like, I look different, I feel different. I've been sick. I can't get it all pulled together. I don't feel like myself.

And right in the middle of maybe the worst season of it, like I was like, "Nothing fit." Everything looked weird. My skin was weird. Like a whole bad situation. One of my best friends got married. And she's one of my best friends but she's also a lot younger than me and extremely attractive, and so are all of her friends. And I was just watching this whole thing shape up and I was like, "This is going to be a little tricky for me."

And I decided, I was like, "You know what? I love her. And I love weddings." And it was after the long pandemic season and I was like, I am going to dance every song all night long as though I am the most beautiful, sensational person on the dance floor. I'm not even close. I'm not even... Like this is a scene. But I'm not going to not dance because I love to dance. I love it. It makes me happy in my whole body, in my spirit. It makes me happy for days afterwards.

So I wore a dress that was sort of medium. I kicked off my heels right away. And I danced every single song until they turn the lights off. And if you ask me what I'm proud of this last year, that's like in my top three. Because everything in me wanted to hide. Everything and we wanted to stay home. Everything in me wanted to be like the calm older lady who watched the young kids dance. It's just not who I am.

I've been a dancer since the day I was born. I love music. I love to celebrate. There was this tiny little thing part of me that says, "I'm not going to give up on one of the best parts of who I am, because I'm embarrassed about how it's going to look to other people." That's a long answer. But get out on the dance floor aggressively.

Do not hide in your own life, show up for your life, show up for weddings, show up for the people that you love, even if, especially if you don't feel great about doing it. Because then there are two problems. Then you don't feel great, and you miss out on your life. I can't think of a time in the last several years where I woke up and was like, "I am thrilled about my appearance, and I can't wait to show it to people." But I'm determined to not miss out on my life because of it. That's it.

Stephanie: I just need to lay down and soak in that for a few minutes. Sidebar, I'm going to a bachelorette party for my sister-in-law this weekend. And it is a very similar situation. I think after this I'm going to go buy some pants because I still haven't bought postpartum pants. I'm about to go buy some jeans that fit so that I can go hang out with the younger people. So I very much relate to that on a very serious level.

Shauna, will you pray for us?

Shauna: I would love to. Dear God, I pray for all of us, every one of us, for the young and the old, for the beautiful and the not so beautiful, for the broken, for the tired, for the bruised, for the joyful, for the grateful, for the strong. All the things that we are sometimes many of them at the same time I pray that you will continue to guide us and comfort us and walk with us. Continue to challenge us and heal us and help us grow.

We believe in your goodness, and your faithfulness, and your presence. And we ask for a deep sense of how beloved we truly are, no matter the things we're carrying, no matter the things that are heavy or hard or broken. We thank you for the good gift that it is to be alive. And we asked for the courage to show up in our own lives, whatever that means. In your name we pray. Amen.

Stephanie: Amen.

[01:02:19] <music>

Outro: You guys, isn't Shauna amazing? Seriously, she's our new best friend, right? I just love her. I love her story. I love her wisdom. There were so many times where I was just bowled over as she talked. I feel like I need to lay down and just soak in all of her wisdom and go back and take a zillion notes. She's so good, right?

Now, don't forget, if you ever want to find the links for any of the things we talked about in our Girls Night episodes, you can always find those in our show notes. Just head over to girlsnightpodcast.com and you'll find the links for everything, including links for Shauna, so you can pick up her books. Seriously, go preorder her new book. It is so good. And it's so helpful for authors when people preorder. You can also follow along with all the great stuff she's doing.

Friends, that's it for today's episode, but we have so much good stuff ahead this season. And with that in mind, now is the perfect time to make sure you're subscribed. Subscribing to the show is the best way to make sure you never miss an episode. It doesn't send you an email or anything. It just makes sure your phone downloads the latest episode when the new one's released.

And I did want to take a second to ask y'all a favor. If you enjoyed this episode or if you've been a Girls Night fan for a while now, would you take just two quick seconds so leave us a rating and review on iTunes? Those reviews help out our podcast so much and it really would mean the world to me. So if you take two quick seconds to do that, I'd be so grateful. Friends, thanks so much for joining me for Girls Night and I will see you next week.