

Ep #162: Self-Forgiveness



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Rachel Hart

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You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 162.

Welcome to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart. If you're an alcoholic or an addict, this is not the show for you. But if you are someone who has a highly functioning life, doing very well, but just drinking a bit too much and wants to take a break, then welcome to the show. Let's get started.

Hello my friends. We are talking about self-forgiveness today. This is a two-part series that I'm doing around Lent, which starts on Wednesday, February 26th because so many of you guys use this as a time to take a break from drinking, to say like, "Oh, I'm not drinking for Lent."

So I want to show you how to do it the right way. I'm also offering a special 30-day break that you can do with me starting on the 26th. So if you're interested in that, all you have to do is go to rachelhart.com/lent. I know a lot of you have given up alcohol for Lent before, and I know you've done it the wrong way. I've done it the wrong way.

I have done it in an attempt to be a better person, or to make up for everything that I did that I thought was wrong. But I'm going to tell you something; you don't need to be a better person because you are already amazing. You're already perfect, you are already wonderful exactly as you are right now in this moment.

And yes, I know that you drank too much, once, or 10 times, or 50 times, or 1000 times, and I don't care. It's irrelevant to me. It does not change the fact that I think you're amazing and perfect and wonderful. I just love you. I truly do. I want you guys to know that because if you listened to last week's episode, you know how shame is such a barrier for so many people.

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I know it's probably been a barrier for you when it comes to change. But know this; shame is never necessary. In fact, it always backfires. Nothing you did or didn't do every is deserving of shame. And I don't care if you were drunk or if you were sober. It doesn't matter. Shame is always, always, always going to work against your ultimate goal, which of course is to show up differently, right? It's to do things differently in the future.

Not only that, shame is always optional. Until you think a thought about whatever you did or didn't do, that right now you're judging as wrong, that thing is meaningless. It has zero meaning. It doesn't make you squirm or turn away or run and hide until you judge it as wrong or bad or immoral.

And I'll tell you this; shame just leads to more hiding. It is not an effective technique for behavior change. It's not really effective for much of anything, except for feeling bad about yourself. And now that you understand the think-feel-act cycle, you can see that the worse that you feel, the more that you take actions that do not serve you.

Negative thoughts and negative feelings do not lead to positive actions and positive results. That's the most important thing to understand. But I know that so many people don't want to let go of shame until they've been forgiven. So let's talk about what forgiveness is and who actually does it out.

So to forgive simply means to stop being angry or resentful at someone for perceived flaw or mistake. Now, I know a lot of you are struggling with forgiving others. That's a topic for another podcast. Today, what we're talking about is self-forgiveness, what it takes in order to forgive yourself.

And so you got to understand, why is it you can't forgive yourself? Why is it that you are angry and resentful towards yourself? I want you to really think about this. What is the thing that you did that you are believing right now is unforgivable?

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I used to have a lot of these. I had too much to drink, I slept with someone that I later regretted, if I said something I wished I hadn't, if I had behaved in a way while I was drinking that I wanted to kind of pretend had never happened. I had so many moments where I was really angry and resentful towards myself for having done those things.

Because I thought I should have known better. What I didn't know is that I wasn't making mistakes. These were not mistakes. And by the way, you're not making mistakes either. Because a mistake is something that is incorrect or wrong, but nothing I did and nothing that you ever did was incorrect or wrong until you judged it as such.

Listen, I really want you to stay with me on this because I know for some of you, I'm really testing right now what your brain believes is true and how your brain sees the world. So hang in there with me. Your brain right now is like, "Listen lady, there is right and there is wrong, period. When I do something right, I feel good, when I do something wrong, I feel bad. When I drink, I seem to do even more things wrong, so I feel worse, so I want to not drink so I'll do more things right and feel better."

This is not how it works, my friends. How you feel is not created by what you do. How you feel is created by what you think. So how it really works is this way. When you judge something is right, you feel good, and when you judge something as wrong, you feel bad. Do you see the difference? The difference between when I do something right, I feel good and when I judge something as right, I feel good, or when I do something wrong, I feel bad versus when I judge something as wrong, I feel bad?

That difference is everything because right and wrong are completely made-up constructs. They aren't true. They don't exist. What one person thinks is right and another person thinks is wrong totally varies. One person might think it's wrong to kill animals for food. Another person might think it's okay, it's right to do that.

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Which person is correct? Neither. What is correct and what is right for each person is dependent on their thoughts that they choose to believe. They're just having different thoughts about the same set of circumstances. This is true in politics, it's true in religion, it's true in every part of life.

Arguing over who is right and who is wrong, it is useless. Now, some of you might be thinking, "Fine, I can see that someone can think it's wrong to kill an animal and someone else could think it's right to kill an animal and that's fine, but what about human life? It's never right, it's never correct to kill someone."

But you know what? There are people who believe that, that any killing ever, it's always wrong, but there are other people who would say, "Sometimes it's justified. Maybe if they tried to kill you, or if they killed someone first or if you're at war or if you're trying to protect someone else." Someone else could make a lot of exceptions to that. Again, how do we know who is correct?

It just depends on how you specifically judge the situation. Right now, whatever it is in your life that you're feeling shame about, you're judging what happened as wrong. But I want to offer you not only that this is a judgement, it's not inherently bad, it's not inherently immoral, but judging it negatively has zero upside for you.

When you drink too much, it wasn't a mistake, it wasn't wrong until you decided that it was with your brain after the fact. Certainly, in the moment you thought it was the right thing to do. And after the fact, some people would look at your behavior and they'd say, "Yeah, not a big deal." Others would say, "No, that's a huge deal." Some people would say, "Kind of should have known better." Others would say, "Only human."

I would say this; whatever you did is because you had a thought in your mind that led to a feeling that led to that action, led to that behavior. That's

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it. Now, how you feel about it afterwards has everything to do with what you think about it after the fact. Because we know the rewriting the past is impossible. Shaming yourself isn't helpful. It leads to hiding. It often leads to more numbing with food and alcohol.

But sometimes, what will happen is people will understand, okay, I can't change the past, so I need to start searching for forgiveness. And I want to tell you this; the search for forgiveness is also misguided. You have to be able to grant yourself forgiveness. Otherwise, it will never work.

Now, when I say this, I'm thinking back to a time in my life when I got very drunk at a close friend's wedding. I got so drunk, I woke up the next day and I really did not know what had happened. I really had very hazy, hazy memories of the night before. And I was mortified. I was mortified at my behavior. I couldn't believe that I was still behaving this way, I couldn't believe that I couldn't get my act together, and I went into hiding.

I was terrified to see my friend. I was terrified to see other friends who had been at that wedding. I was so embarrassed by something that I couldn't even remember. And I just hid out. And a couple months past and my friend sent me an email and I remember, I saw her name in my inbox and there was just dread in my body because I was thinking, "Oh my god, here it comes. This is the email. She's going to tell me what a jerk I am."

And I opened it up and inside was simply a lovely happy birthday message. No mention of the wedding that had happened a couple months before. And I couldn't hide out any longer. She just sent me this lovely email and so I wrote her back and I thanked her for her birthday wishes, but I also apologized for my behavior and I told her how mortified and how sorry I was and she immediately wrote me back and said, "There's no need to apologize."

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She had never been angry with me. She'd only been kind of worried. And you would think that that would have been the happy ending. You'd think, "Oh, there we go. She wasn't angry. She was only worried about me. I got my forgiveness." But it wasn't a happy ending. Her message didn't absolve me of any of the shame that I was feeling. Not at all. Not one bit.

In fact, I remember in that moment feeling worse because now I had a new set of thoughts. Now I was thinking, "Here she is being so kind and so nice and I clearly don't deserve it. She's trying to make me feel better. I'm still a jerk for what I did. I don't deserve to feel any better. I'm such an embarrassment."

So even though she forgave me, said she had never been angry, there I was in that moment still with so much shame. Because I hadn't changed my thoughts about what had happened that night, and I didn't know how to forgive myself. The forgiveness that you think you need is never from someone else. It's a release of anger and resentment from yourself about yourself.

The shame I had about that night, it wasn't helping me. It was keeping me hiding. But the search for forgiveness wasn't working either because I didn't realize that only I was capable of forgiving myself. Only I had the power to do that. And the only reason that I thought I needed forgiveness was because I judged what I had done in such a harsh, negative way.

So the only reason that you can't forgive yourself is because of a 'should.' I should have known better. I should have seen it coming. I should have been more careful. I should have been more responsible. And it doesn't matter if this has to do with drinking or something else. It all works the same.

All of your shoulds are fighting with reality. That is what is blocking forgiveness. Now listen, how should I have known better not to get that

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drunk at a wedding? I shouldn't have, because you know what, because of how I thought at weddings, they were excruciating for me.

Either I was single, as I was at that wedding, and I used the occasion of a wedding to trot out all my thoughts about how I was so far behind my friends and so stunted and something was wrong with me that I wasn't in a relationship at this point in my life, or I would go to a wedding and be in a relationship and then I would use the occasion of the wedding to bring out all my thoughts about the relationship and how it was inadequate and why weren't we walking down the aisle yet, and why isn't this relationship headed anywhere.

And so in response to all of these negative thoughts that I would trot out when two people were getting married, what would I do? I would have a lot of negative emotion, so I'd head to the bar because that had always been my coping mechanism. Try to drink your sorrows away.

But guess what happens? There's never enough alcohol in the world to get rid of a feeling. In those moments, I just wanted to drink and I would keep drinking until I could stop feeling that feeling. But guess what? It doesn't ever go away because you're never changing your thoughts. You're just temporarily making yourself kind of unconscious to it.

In my case, very unconscious to it, but it was certainly there the next day and the next week and the next month and the next year. So of course I was drinking too much at a wedding. That's what I did at weddings. Not because something was wrong with me, because I had no idea how the think-feel-act cycle was working. I had no idea how to cope with my emotions other than numbing.

I thought weddings just made me feel terrible and that I needed to run to the bar to feel better. Whatever you did that you're telling yourself right now you shouldn't have done, you are wrong about that. You couldn't have

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done differently yet because at that time, you didn't know how to do differently. You didn't know how to show up in a different way.

And not knowing a different way doesn't mean that there's something wrong with you or that you're a bad person or you're less evolved. It just means that you had a thought in your head in that moment that led to a feeling and an action and you didn't question any of it, probably because it was so fast it was so unconscious, you didn't even know it was there.

Maybe you didn't even know about the think-feel-act cycle. Really, that's it. Whatever you did is just because you had a sentence in your mind. That's the entire story. No one can offer you forgiveness but yourself, even if the person is mad at you. Even if someone thinks you're a bad person. Even if they blame you.

Because guess what? If someone else is mad and angry at you, well, it's just sentences in their head with a should attached to it. Think about the times that you have told yourself you couldn't forgive someone. Why was that? Because you were blaming them for how you feel right now.

But other people don't create your feelings and you don't create other people's feelings. Whatever someone's opinion of you is or what you did, their explanation most likely omits the fact that you did it because you had a sentence in your head. They're using blame as a way to explain something that they don't understand, in an attempt for them to feel better.

You're doing the exact same thing, just in the reverse. But here is the thing my friends; there really is a path to forgiving yourself. It's understanding that you're the creator of your own pain. It's understanding that beating yourself up and telling yourself that you deserve to feel this way is never going to serve you.

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Not only that, it's not about making you feel better. It's never going to get you to show up differently. There is a path that you can follow, and it's really a simple process once you learn it. You have to stop running from the feeling. That's number one, because you can't outrun it. You cannot outrun shame. You can't outrun your anger or your resentment. You have to stop running from it so that you can actually shift how you deal with it.

The second thing you have to do is understand why whatever happened, happened. Again, if you're running from the feeling and you're trying to numb it away and drinking and eating and spending and distracting yourself over it, you can't get to this second step. So you have to understand why it happened.

And this means writing out the self-coaching model, writing out the circumstance and the thought and the feeling and the action and the result. And in particular, look very carefully at the results that your current thinking is creating for you. This is what I'm always helping the women in my Take A Break program do, to really understand how their thoughts are creating results that are not serving them.

The third thing is to really just weigh the cost of not forgiving yourself. When you really understand what your thoughts are creating, how do you show up in life when you're not forgiving yourself? Do you dig in deeper? Do you numb more? Do you hide more? Do you try to be perfect? Do you try to be a people-pleaser? What are you doing? You have to weigh the cost of whether or not that's actually working for you.

And then decide how you want to show up now in this moment. You actually can start from a new self-coaching model, start from that action line. What do you want to do now? What would you be doing differently instead? Once you can ask yourself that, you can work backwards and say, well, how would I have to feel and think?

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But most important, the path to self-forgiveness is really using the moment to learn and grow, to learn about yourself, learn about your mind, learn about the unconscious think-feel-act cycles that are running in your mind. Learn about why you're not questioning them or challenging them. Learn about how right now you might think that things just happen on autopilot, but actually, there is a thought, there is a feeling before you said yes to that drink.

Withholding forgiveness from yourself and choosing to suffer in self-recrimination, it doesn't serve anyone. It certainly doesn't serve you. That's what we'll see in the think-feel-act cycle, but guess what, it doesn't serve anybody else either. You suffering doesn't make anybody else feel better.

I want you to think about this really, when someone says, "I hope they're rotting in hell." Does it seem like they're feeling better? Does it seem like it's coming from a peaceful place? No. You withholding forgiveness is not helping anyone. Most of all, it's not helping you.

Because here's the thing; the truth is being fully alive means you are going to do things that later you wished you had done differently. And here's what I want to promise; this will be true always for the rest of your life. This is the price of being human. We are imperfect, we are complex. Either you can learn and grow from it, you can teach yourself how to do that, or you can just dig the hole even deeper.

And I promise, this work is challenging, especially for some of you who feel like you have a lot of things in life that you feel a lot of shame about, you feel a lot of shame about your drinking, or your eating, or your spending, whatever it is, or if you feel or have decided that certain things that you have done don't deserve forgiveness, this work will be challenging. It will take time, but it is possible, and it really is the only way to ever sustainable change your habits.

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You're not going to let go of shame and forgiveness most likely in one fell swoop. And it's why I created the Take A Break program, to really show you how to do this, to show you how to change how you feel. Show you how to let go of the shame and to forgive yourself when it feels impossible.

Because if you take a break from drinking but you're still steeped in shame and you're hiding out and you believe that you don't deserve anyone's forgiveness, well, it's not going to be very good. I've done it. It was not fun. I want to show you how you can really learn how to manage your mind and how to feel less shame, and how to have more compassion for yourself, and how that compassion isn't just because you're being nice to yourself. It's because it's creating the results you actually want in your life.

So here's the thing; if you want to use Lent, which starts on Wednesday February 26th as a time to take a break from drinking, release the shame, stop beating yourself up, learn how to forgive yourself, then come join me. All you have to do is go to rachelhart.com/lent. It's going to be so good. It's going to be so powerful because this is the thing that I see so many women wrestling with, and it's the thing that so many programs out there just don't even really touch.

You have to understand the self-coaching model, you have to understand the think-feel-act cycle, and you have to take these two and put them together and learn how to actually start thinking differently about whatever you have done in the past, however much you have had to drink, whatever you have done, related to alcohol or not. Because that really is the key to success.

Alright, rachelhart.com/lent if you want to use Lent this year as a way to change your relationship with alcohol permanently. Alright, see you guys next week.

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Hey, if you're a woman who enjoys this podcast and wants to have me as your coach, you have to join the *Take A Break* program. It's a 30-day break from drinking that will teach you how to say no to your urges without deprivation, the secret to not needing a drink in any situation, including not needing a drink to take the edge off, and never again feeling like you can't trust yourself around alcohol. Join me over at RachelHart.com/join. Together, we're going to blow your mind.