

Ep #179: I Can Stop Whenever I Want To



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With Your Host

Rachel Hart

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

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You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 179.

Whether you want to drink less or stop drinking, this podcast will help you change the habit from the inside out. We're challenging conventional wisdom about why people drink and why it can be hard to resist temptation. No labels, no judgment, just practical tools to take control of your desire and stop worrying about your drinking. Now, here's your host Rachel Hart.

Well, hello everyone. We are going to do a deep dive into three very important thoughts today that I believe are huge barriers when it comes to changing your relationship with alcohol and also hugely misunderstood.

So these three thoughts are, "I can stop whenever I want to," "I can quit any time" and, "I don't have to have a drink." Now, before we go any further, let me just be really, really clear with you. I am not going to talk about these thoughts in the way that you might expect.

Because usually, they are trotted out as examples of someone lying to themselves, and that's not what we're talking about today. So the logic goes that when someone says, "I can stop whenever I want to," that they're deluding themselves. They're not actually in control and they can't actually quit whenever they want to. That's a lie.

So what we have been taught and a message certainly that I hear quite a bit is that what people actually have to acknowledge is that alcohol is in control, and if you have to tell yourself these thoughts, you're really in denial.

Now, this is something that I think is incredibly problematic when it comes to trying to change your relationship with alcohol. Because this understanding that you're lying to yourself and you're deluding yourself and actually alcohol is in control, this is just feeding right now the habit. It's

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feeding all of the beliefs that we are taught about why we think it's hard to change our drinking or impossible.

Many people think it's impossible to change your desire because the idea goes that alcohol is running the show and alcohol is creating your desire and alcohol is the thing that's tempting you. And unless you are very disciplined to your desires and your temptations, then alcohol is going to be what's calling the shots.

What I'm going to ask you to do today is really just to open yourself up and see if you are willing to go along with me on this ride and just turn these thoughts on their head. Let's just look at these thoughts together and see what we can find when we look closely but also curiously with them.

Now, the most important thing is always that you get to decide what you want to think. Everything that I'm teaching you here about how your brain works and how the think-feel-act cycle is fueling the habit, it's not about telling you what to think. That's always up to you. It's really just learning that you have this tool to understand how you think and how your thoughts affect your feelings and your decisions, including the decision to drink.

But at the end of the day, you get to decide what you want to believe and whether or not you want to subscribe to these thoughts. Now, the other reason why I want to discuss this is because I watch women in my 30-day program using the challenge of taking a break to try to disprove these thoughts.

And most of the time, they're not even consciously aware that they're doing this. But as I am coaching them, I start to see what's going on. I start to see that inside, they're very worried. Like, what if this is true? What if I can't stop? What if I can't quit? What if I have to have a drink? What then?

And those thoughts really freak them out. And when they're really freaked out, they want to kind of create any and all evidence that these thoughts

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aren't true. But here's what I'm going to tell you; not drinking for a set period of time, taking a break for as long as you want, in fact, not drinking for the rest of your life doesn't actually solve the problem.

Because all it does is put on blinders so you can't actually see what's going on with these three thoughts. And so today, I really want you to start to take off these blinders. I can't stress this enough. It does not matter how many days you cross off a calendar. I know this from experience. I know this from having an entire year in my 20s when I didn't drink and I still had so much desire and felt so much temptation and always felt like I was missing out.

It's not the number of days. And if you focus there, if you focus on trying to collect days as a way to disprove these thoughts, what if I can't quit, what if I can't stop, if that is your method for trying to prove that you're in control, it's not going to work.

Now, keep in mind, I was in the same boat for a long time. I remember the very first time that I took a break, which was shortly after my 22nd birthday. There was a part of me who was a little afraid, maybe you can't do this, Rachel, which is kind of crazy because I had so much more evidence in my life at that point that I could do everything in my life without drinking because I was pretty young at that point.

But still, my brain was like, I don't know, I don't know if you're going to be successful, I don't know if you can succeed. It's going to be really hard to socialize, it's going to be really awkward. And so that's what I was doing the very first time that I said no to alcohol.

It wasn't about anything that I teach here. It was about just gritting my teeth and using willpower and trying to prove to myself that I can stop any time I want to. But I was completely blind to what was actually happening beneath the surface.

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And so yeah, I gave my body a period of time without drinking, but I didn't actually do the work to change the habit. And that's what was so frustrating for me for so many years after. That's why I kept flip-flopping back and forth and I wasn't actually creating change for myself. And that's what I want to make sure you are able to avoid.

All I could see back then was fear in front of me, like, "Oh no, what if something is really wrong with me?" And all I saw behind me was a calendar. Okay, you got a day, you got a week, you got a month, you got two months. So I saw fear ahead of me and the calendar behind me, and I was trying to outrun my fear by crossing days off.

But you can't outrun fear. I hope if you have listened to this podcast and you've heard me talk about the think-feel-act cycle, you'll know fear is an emotion. Fear is not something that you can outrun because the cause of your fear is not what's happening out there. It's what's happening inside of you. It's what you're thinking.

So it's not alcohol or how much you drank or the fact that you said you were going to have one but you actually finished the bottle last night. That's not actually the problem. The problem when it comes to what you're afraid of, it's what's happening in your mind. And if you want to actually change any kind of fear or anxiety you have, you have to go to the root cause.

It has nothing to do with crossing days off a calendar. So let's be curious with these thoughts. Instead of understanding them the way that we are taught to, which is either you're in control or you're powerless, let's see if we can understand them in a different way.

Let's understand the thoughts, "I can stop whenever I want to," "I can quit any time," "I don't have to have a drink." So let's understand these thoughts through the lens of your emotions, how you're feeling, what's happening for you in the current moment.

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So in order to do this, you have to complete the thought. That's what most people don't understand is that this is an incomplete sentence. I can stop whenever I want to, but I don't want to right now. I can quit any time, but I don't want to quit today. I don't have to have a drink, but I want to.

That's what most people don't understand is going on there. They're only saying half of the thought. They haven't completed it. And if you want to start to understand this in a different way, you have to complete it. You have to acknowledge that you don't want to. You don't want to say no right now, you don't want to get started today, you don't want to turn down the drink. That's okay.

You acknowledge that so you can be curious with it. Because all of a sudden, when you finish the thought, that's when things get interesting. That's where you have so much opportunity for growth because then you can start getting curious. That's when you can start asking yourself questions. Well, why don't I want to? Why don't I want to say no today? Why is it that I really want to have a drink right now?

And if you're truly getting curious, you will go beyond, "I just love to drink." You will go beyond, "I just want to have it." You will start to see that there is real powerful information for you there. But when you just talk about these ideas as control, when you say, "Well, I can stop whenever I want to, I'm in control, it's not alcohol controlling me," when you just understand these thoughts through the lens of control, what you're doing is staying in this framework of either I have control or I'm powerless.

That framework is not helping you. Not only that, but that framework is denying you incredibly precious information. Information that's going to help you change the habit. When you decide, well, I guess alcohol has all the power, it renders me powerless, that's the end of the story. What are you going to do with that? Where do you go from there?

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It's not just that I think this framework is wrong when we try to get people to believe that the way to change their relationship with alcohol is by admitting that they're powerless. It's not just that it's wrong. I think that that framework really denies you and everyone incredibly important opportunities to examine how the habit is really working and what is really fueling it.

And I promise, it's not about alcohol. What's really fueling it is how you feel when you say no. Now, I say this over and over again. We're not looking for some sort of deep, dark, terrible feeling. Sometimes it's just deprivation. Sometimes it's just a little anxiety. Sometimes it's just boredom.

But you have to be curious about that. When you have a long day, how do you feel when you say no to a drink? When your partner comes home with a bottle to split, how do you feel if you say no? When you're at a party or a celebration or a fancy dinner and you're holding a club soda and other people are drinking, how do you feel?

That's what you have to pay attention to. You have to connect with that information. This is not touchy-feely stuff. A lot of times, what's how we kind of relegate the world of emotions, as if it's this kind of silly, touchy-feely stuff. No, it is the information that is so important, so necessary, so vital for you learning how to change the habit.

Because here's what I know. Saying no, crossing days off a calendar, if you're not enjoying yourself, if you're not having a good time, if you're hiding out at home, your efforts to change are not going to work. You have to learn not just how to say no to a drink but how to enjoy yourself while you're doing it.

That's the piece that most people neglect to tell you. If you're not having a good time, if you're not enjoying yourself, your change is never going to last because you're always going to feel like you're saying no at the expense of yourself. I promise you, if you skip this step, if you try to say, "The feeling

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stuff, who cares? That's not what's going on here," you're going to deny yourself information that would otherwise help you change your habit.

Because the habit is not just the action of pouring a glass of wine and then pouring another and pouring another. Our actions don't happen in vacuums. They are connected to what is happening in your mind, what you're thinking, the sentences running through your head, which create how you feel.

Your emotional state, whether it is desire or deprivation or loneliness or boredom or anxiety or excitement, whatever it is. Your thoughts and your feelings and your actions always go together. There's always a thought, there's always a feeling. And I understand for some of you, especially if you're new to this work, it can feel as if the action just happens, but I promise you, that is never the case.

So when you have a thought like, "I can stop whenever I want," ask yourself, be curious with yourself, why don't I want to stop right now? Because I hate feeling deprived? Because there's too much going on in the world? Because I don't want to feel different from other people? Get curious.

When you have a thought like, "I can quit any time I want to," ask yourself, well, why don't I want to? What do I envision that my life would be like without alcohol? What would I envision my life would be like at the end of the day or on a date or at a wedding if I wasn't drinking? How am I anticipating I would feel without it?

When you tell yourself, "I don't have to drink," ask yourself, okay fine, but why do you want to right now? How are you feeling in the current moment? How do you anticipate feeling when you say yes? How do you anticipate feeling if you were to say no? And how proficient are you at handling all of these emotions on your own?

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I'm going to tell you, I was not very proficient at handling them on my own. I never learned this. No one told me what to do. No one explained to me what an emotion was or that I was perfectly capable of handling it or that it was totally harmless. I didn't know what was going on so I was just trying to do the best that I could with the limited information that I had.

And the limited information that I had was, "Oh, when you feel terrible, when you have a negative emotion, eat something, drink something, buy something, distract yourself." That's all I knew how to do. The problem with these thoughts and telling yourself I can stop whenever I want to is that you're just engaging in a power struggle.

And you're engaging in this power struggle that is pointless. So you're sitting there kind of wrestling yourself. Well, who's more powerful? Is it me or is the booze? But that's totally irrelevant because the struggle isn't between you and alcohol. The struggle, the real struggle, if you are curious with what's going on is between you and how you feel when you say no and why you don't want to feel that way.

You have to bring curiosity to that. Now, the good news, the news that I was never taught when I was growing up is that every emotion is harmless. Every single one. No matter how you are feeling. It's totally harmless. It's not a problem. It's not an emergency. We don't need to run from it. We don't need to drink over it or eat over it or try to escape it.

But that's not what my brain used to tell me. I spent years and years and years having the exact opposite thought, that emotions were a big problem, that they were too much and too powerful and overwhelming and unmanageable, and I had to get away from them. I had to stop them immediately.

So if you can relate to that, you can start to see how learning how to change the story that you have about how you're feeling and your emotional state and your ability to handle them on your own is going to be

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so important to unraveling this habit. Otherwise, you can change your drinking, you can say no, but if you don't learn how to have a different relationship with your emotions, guess what's going to happen?

That fear that you have of I don't want to feel this way, I hate feeling anxious, I hate feeling bored, I hate feeling awkward, it's just going to rear its head in a whole bunch of other different ways. I think that 2020 has been a perfect example of all of this.

We're in the midst of a pandemic. Right now, in this country, we're facing a lot of social upheaval and unrest. And you know what, it's really important to be curious with yourself and honest with yourself about how you're doing. How are you feeling? What are you telling yourself that you need in order to make it through this time in your life?

Are you kind of - we got to batten down the hatches just so we can make it through to the other side. Or are you using this moment to create a new relationship with yourself? Because this really isn't about alcohol in isolation and it's not about the bottle of wine. It's not about your favorite cocktail. It's the work of learning how to show up differently with yourself and your thoughts and your feelings and your actions.

It's the work of learning how to show up differently with your desire and your deprivation and every emotion that you feel. It's the work of learning how to be your own best authority and decide what's right for you when it comes to the relationship you want to have with alcohol and also the relationship you want to have with yourself.

That's always the case. That's what this work has always been about. It was what this work was about last year, and it's also what this work is about in 2020. Your emotions have always been the missing piece of the puzzle. It's not about getting to some magical point where we don't have to worry about negative emotions.

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It's teaching our brain that they're nothing to worry about. I really see how much people are struggling right now, especially with everything that's happening in the world. And I see how many of you are delaying change. And saying I just need to make it through until things get back to normal.

And I want you to know that this is the perfect time. It is the ideal time for you to learn how to change your drinking, change your relationship with alcohol, and change your relationship with yourself. In fact, any time that your brain is saying, "Let's just wait," that is a cue for you to sit up and pay attention and ask yourself why.

So I'm going to be doing a special 30-day challenge in the Take A Break program starting Monday, July 6th. So I thought it would be a great idea to do it right after the Independence Day holiday here in the US. Because I think everybody could use a little bit more independence for themselves.

I want everyone who is doing this work to feel self-sufficient and in control and totally capable no matter what is happening, no matter if your kid's sleep away camp has been canceled for the summer, no matter if you're kind of freaked out because you're living in a place where they're starting to ease restrictions. And now you're like, oh, I have to socialize so I'm not really sure that I'm going to be able to say no.

I have a lot of people who are telling me that, that they've been doing really well saying no during quarantine, but now that restrictions are getting lifted, they're nervous about that. Of course, I have people in the complete end of the spectrum who being at home, not being able to socialize, being by themselves has actually made it more challenging for them to say no.

You might also just be watching everything that's happening in the news and find yourself filled with a lot of emotion, a lot of anger or grief or hopelessness that you don't know what to do with. What do we do when we don't know how to handle our emotion? We look for ways to escape.

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So I think this time is incredibly powerful. I want you to learn how to be your own best authority. Not just what's right for you when it comes to drinking, but what's right for you when it comes to everything in your life. There is so much wisdom, so much knowing inside of yourself that you can't access when you're stuck in the habit.

So here's the thing; if you want to join me for this July challenge, it starts on Monday the 6th. All you have to do is head on over to rachelhart.com/july. But even if you don't, please, please, please do not allow yourself to have these thoughts, "I can't stop whenever I want, I can quit any time, I don't have to drink," without getting curious about them, without actually completing the thought and asking yourself, why don't I want to say no right now?

Because trust me, there is so much for you in your answer. So much that is going to help you change the habit. This work that you are doing, it is not a power struggle. It is not proving who is stronger because alcohol has no power. It just sits there. You've always had all of the power inside of you. It's just that no one has ever shown you how it works, how to wield it, and how to use it to develop the relationship that you want to have in your life.

But please, you can't access all of this power if you refuse to answer these questions. Alright, that's it for today. I will see you next week.

Okay, listen up, changing your drinking is so much easier than you think. Whether you want to drink less or not at all, you don't need more rules or willpower. You need a logical framework that helps you understand and, more importantly, change the habit from the inside out. It starts with my 30-day challenge. Besides the obvious health benefits, taking a break from drinking is the fastest way to figure out what's really behind your desire. This radically different approach helps you succeed by dropping the perfectionism and judgment that blocks change. Decide what works best for you when it comes to drinking. Discover how to trust yourself and feel

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truly powered to take it or leave it. Head on over to RachelHart.com/join and start your transformation today.