

## Ep #2: Desire: Why Willpower is Not the Answer



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Rachel Hart**

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## Ep #2: Desire: Why Willpower is Not the Answer

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.

Welcome back everybody, we are talking about desire today, our desire to drink. I am going to share with you a little bit about some common misconceptions that we have about desire. I'm going to talk to you about what creates our desire to drink, and I will tell you it's probably not what you think and I am going to show you the very step if you want to start to change your desire and decrease your desire to drink.

Now getting a handle on the desire to drink, it really is a holy grail for most of my clients. I know I thought it was a holy grail as well when I was trying to figure out this issue for myself. People would come to me for so many reasons, they might come to me because they are tired of how alcohol is affecting their relationships or they are frustrated that sometimes they drink too much, and they do not know why? And no matter what it is everyone will say the same thing.

They will say I wish I did not desire to drink so much. Things would be easier if I just did not have this big desire to drink, and I do not know why my desire is so much bigger than some other people in my life who do not seem to have as much desire to drink as I do. And now wanting to contain your desire, it's not unique to drinking, it's something that people think about in lots of different areas of their life. You can think about it in terms of weight loss.

People will say well I wish I didn't desire to eat so much, I wish I didn't really like chocolate, I wish I didn't really like pasta or cake, whatever it is, and if I did not desire food it would be a lot easier to lose weight. The same is true for money. People who are trying to save money will be frustrated by their desire to spend it, and they will say I wish I did not have this desire to go shopping or to buy clothing or to go on vacation, whatever it is. But it is that desire to spend it, that is making it hard to save.

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So, all of us can relate to wanting to desire something less, and most people believe the answer is will power. Right, the ability to resist your desire, the ability to say no, the ability to turn your desire down, and when we give in we blame a lack of will power, and we think we just need more of it. We need more discipline, more ability to say no.

Now, will power can work, and you may have used will power yourself. You can say no, you can resist your desire, you can turn your desire down, and it can work for a period of time. You may have even used will power to take a break from drinking for a week or a month or a year.

I know that the very first time that I took a break from drinking when I was 22, I stopped for an entire year, and I used will power the entire time. It was turning down drinks, and gritting my teeth, and white knuckling, and just saying no over, and over, and over again. But here is the thing.

What we are doing is telling ourselves that we cannot have what we want. Our desire is still there, and there are two problems with this. The first is that when you say no over and over and over again, it's exhausting, it wears you out. It takes a lot of mental energy to have your desire keep appearing and keep pushing it away, keep resisting it, and people get really worn out when they are just using will power.

The second problem is that many people, myself included, would spend the time feeling like we were missing out because we still really want the thing that we are telling ourselves we cannot have. We still have the desire, we still really want to drink, we are just telling ourselves that we cannot have it.

So we feel like we are missing out, and for a lot of people if that goes on long enough, eventually we will give in. Now, people will say well that is just the human condition, and I believed this for a long time too. I thought some people are just born with more desire than others and it is just kind of you're cursed to have that much desire, and you better hope that you have a lot of will power, and if you do not have will power, you have got to keep trying to build it, you just have to keep trying harder, and harder to resist.

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I really believed that my desire to drink was just part of me. It was just something that I had, and it was something that at times I had a lot of, and there was nothing to do about it, I just had to keep resisting.

Now, the good news is that we have got desire totally backwards. It is not fixed, it is not static, it is not something that you cannot change. In fact, you can learn how to decrease and reduce your desire. The thing is it is that no one shows us how? But before I start talking to you about how to actually do that I want to go back and talk a little about what creates our desire in the first place.

So, here is how I used to understand my desire to drink. I really understood it in two ways. The first was my desire was kind of inexplicable and so I thought that my desire was this mysterious force that would sometimes appear and sometimes it made sense when it appeared, and other times it really did not but the truth was I was not very good at predicting it. Maybe I would be commuting home from work and I would be riding the subway in New York city. I would be thinking about my day. I would be running through a work project that I was working on. I would be totally focused on something else and all of a sudden this desire would appear, this desire to drink.

I did not know where it came from, I did not why it appeared, but all of a sudden there it was. And usually the desire would appear and I would find myself heading to the liquor store when I got out of the subway station and getting a bottle of wine, and I probably had not planned on drinking that night but before I knew it, I was, because this desire had just appeared out of the blue.

The other way I understood my desire was that it was really created by alcohol itself, right? So, I thought that being around alcohol and being around people drinking was what created my desire. It felt like it was driven by things that were external to me.

So, for example I would decide that maybe I would be going out to dinner with friends and I knew that I did not want to drink tonight. Maybe I had a presentation or I had a big day, the next morning and so I want to get a

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good night's sleep, and I would tell myself, "You know what, I am not going to drink tonight, it's not a big deal, I am just going to skip it," and I would feel pretty good about that decision, and then I would get to the restaurant, and I would be sitting there with my friends, and they would be drinking, and I would just feel all this desire in me, I wanted to drink too.

So, it felt as if I got to the restaurant, and all of a sudden I was surrounded by people drinking, and I was surrounded by alcohol, and that is what was creating my desire. Because half-an-hour earlier, I didn't have much desire and I felt pretty good about my decision not to drink, and it really felt like it was driven by this outside force.

Now, here is the thing desire is not this mysterious thing that comes out of nowhere, and it is not created by things that are external to us. It is not created by alcohol, which by the way is really good news. It's created by your thoughts.

Now, in the last episode I introduced you to something for the think-feel-act cycle, and it is a cycle that really explains why we act the way we do and why we feel the way we do. So, the think-feel-act cycle works exactly in the order that I say it. You think a thought, which creates a feeling or an emotion, and when you have that feeling or emotion that drives an action, really simple.

Now, in this case the action would be having a drink, but why do we have that drink in the first place? Because we feel a feeling, because we have an emotion, now feeling is desire. So, desire is the feeling in the think-feel-act cycle. Now, it is not just an action, and a feeling in the cycle, there is the first part, and that explains why we have the desire to drink. There is always a thought before that creates it. We are always thinking a thought beforehand that creates it.

Now, when I was starting out with this work, it really did not feel that it works this way. It really felt to me that my desire to drink either came out of nowhere and was kind of unpredictable or it was definitely being created by being in the presence of alcohol. So, it did not feel like it works this way,

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even though I intellectually understood the think-feel-act cycle, it just did not resonate.

Now, here is why? First, you probably are not used to paying attention to your thoughts. I know I was not. My thoughts were just kind of background noise. They weren't something that I paid a lot of attention to or tuned into on a regular basis. In fact, a lot of the times I was trying to tune my thoughts out because there was so much negative thinking in there, I did not really want to listen to what I was thinking and the second reason was because no one taught me this cycle for a very long time in my life.

So, I was not used to thinking that my thoughts created my feelings or that my actions were driven by the way I was feeling. So, I didn't have this cycle as a reference point to pay attention to.

Now, here is what is happening. You learn to desire a drink at certain times. For example, maybe when you get home from work, maybe when you have dinner with friends, maybe when you are going to a restaurant or you are heading out to a party or you are watching a game. We learn to desire drinking at certain times, and we also will learn to desire having a drink as a way to feel better.

So, we might teach ourselves that when stress or anxiety or insecurity or awkwardness or anger or some sort of a negative emotion appears, we teach ourselves that having a drink is a way to feel better, and what happens is that in either of these situations with enough repetition, enough times that you are drinking at the same time, you are drinking in the same situation, your desire becomes a habit.

Now, here is the thing you know that your desire is learned, you know that you taught it to yourself, it is not just something that you have. Because there was a time in your life when you came home from school, when you ate dinner, and when you went to restaurants, when you went to parties, when you watched baseball games, and you did not desire to drink because you did not drink.



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So, it was something that you learned, and if you learned to desire alcohol, you can also learn how not to desire it if you are given the steps to do that. So, how do you start to decrease your desire?

If you habitualized your desire, first you need to bring your unconscious thinking back to the surface because we know that desire does not just appear out of the blue, desire isn't created by things external to us, there is always a thought first, that is how the cycle works. So, you have to bring that thinking back to the surface, and it feels like that thinking is not even there right now because you have so habitualized it.

Now, a lot of people that I work with will want to skip this step, they will say, "Ok, so if my thoughts create desire can't we just start thinking differently, cannot I just start thinking I do not desire alcohol," and here is the thing you cannot because it will not be believable. When I started this process, if I had just told myself over and over again, "I do not desire alcohol, I do not want to drink, I do not want this, I do not want it," I mean maybe I could have resisted, maybe that would have helped me with will power but it certainly would not have done anything to reduce my desire, my desire was still there and it was still there because I was not accessing the thought that was initially creating it.

So, you have to understand what is creating your desire in the first place if you want to change it. So, how do you bring thinking that has become unconscious back to the surface, and the answer is you have to build in a pause, and this is how you do it.

You need to wait for your desire to drink to appear, you need to wait for that desire to appear and then pause. You need to delay drinking, delay the reward, right the reward is having a drink and that delay will allow you to surface your thinking.

Now, the reason that this works is because you are not used to doing this, you are used to doing the opposite. You are used to having a desire appear and then shortly thereafter fulfilling that desire, giving yourself the reward pouring yourself a drink, that is what you are used to doing. And because it happened so quickly sometimes, you are at a restaurant, and

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you just order a drink, you are at a game and you just order a beer, right you come home from work, and you just pour yourself a glass of wine. It happened so quickly there is no time to notice any thinking and that is what the pause is there for. That is why you need to delay, so that your thinking can start to reveal itself.

So, once your desire to drink has appeared pause or delay for at least the first thirty minutes, try thirty minutes before having a drink. You weren't always in need to wait this long but at first especially when you are not used to this technique, it might take a while for the thoughts to surface. But here is the thing, you cannot distract yourself, a lot of people will here pause and delay and they will think, "Ok, fine I will just set thirty minutes on my phone and start a timer, and I will just wait until the timer goes off, and then I can have my drink." It doesn't work like. It doesn't work like that because you need to stay present, right the whole point is that you are trying to notice what thinking comes up, and you can't do that if you are not present.

So, do not distract yourself. You want to notice what is coming up. Don't try to change it. Don't try to change your thinking or control your thinking or tell yourself you should not be thinking this way. Don't judge it, just let your thoughts surface. You might even want to try writing it down, and you can do this even if you are out with people, right. Everybody has cell phones and just send a little text message to yourself with whatever thought appears.

So, you want to let your thoughts surface, you want to watch them, and notice them without trying to change them and then ultimately we are not going to go through it in this episode but ultimately you are going to replace them, and that is how you start to change your desire. But before you can change your desire you have to first understand how it works, and to understand how it works you have to use this process, you have to pause, and you have to let your thoughts come to the surface.

Now, this can sound simple, pausing can sound pretty simple but I promise it will take a little bit of practice. When I first started this work myself, here

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are some of the thoughts that I noticed just to give you a sense of what the thoughts can look like but keep in mind that yours maybe totally unique to you. What I am about to list here is not the full spectrum of thoughts that you can have that can create desire.

So, here are some of mine, I want a drink, I deserve a treat, I need a break, I had a rough day, I have got to take the edge off, it is the only way to calm down, it will relax me, I can't deal with this feeling right now. I need to feel better, I feel so awkward, drinking just makes things better, I'm not fun without it this will be no fun without booze. I cannot stand these people unless I am drinking. One glass will not hurt just tonight. It is not a big deal, I like it, it tastes good, I love fancy cocktails, everyone else is drinking, people will not notice if I'm not. It is normal to drink, I do not want to miss out, I need something to loosen up, it is a celebration why not? Who cares? And screw it.

So, these were all the thoughts that I noticed that were fueling my desire, and once I started paying attention to them it became easier to notice when they appeared. I started to notice for some of these thoughts I was thinking them all the time, right? They were coming up quite a bit, and the more I thought them the more my desire grew.

So, this really is the very first step in figuring out how to reduce your desire, and when I started it I had no idea that my desire was created by my thoughts. I really believed that it was this mysterious force that sometimes appeared or it was created by being in the presence of alcohol, I really thought that is how it worked for so many years but once I tried this technique and I started to pause and delay so that I had time to surface my thinking, all of a sudden I saw how I was thinking all these thoughts that were creating desire, and when I realized that I was the one thinking these thoughts that it was not this mysterious force, it was not created by alcohol itself, all of a sudden I felt so much more in control because if they were thoughts that I was thinking, if they were thoughts that I had learned to habitualize, they were thoughts that I could also work to change.

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And I said this earlier it really is the best news ever that alcohol is not what is creating your desire because when I thought alcohol was what was creating my desire, I also thought that the way not to desire it was to remove myself, was to sequester myself from it. I had to keep away from it, and I used to joke sometimes that everything would be a lot easier if I just could live in a cabin in the woods, right? If I could just be away from all these temptations it will be so much easier.

But what I realized doing this work is that I didn't need to remove myself. I didn't need to stay away from certain things because alcohol itself was not creating my desire, what I had to do with pay attention to all those thoughts that I had when I was around alcohol, right? It was all the thoughts that I was thinking that was creating my desire, and the reason that I do not desire alcohol now is because I have a completely different set of thoughts about alcohol, those thoughts that were so automatic for so long in my life are not the same thoughts that I have anymore.

The other thing that I realized is that all my efforts to reign in my drinking were hit or miss because I assumed that alcohol was running the show, I assumed that alcohol was the thing creating my desire and I didn't have any control. When I started paying attention to my thinking, and understanding that the think-feel-act cycle was behind everything, that my desire was being created by my thoughts, I realized how much control I had to actually change my desire.

Alright, so let us recap here. Your desire is not fixed, it's not a mysterious force, it's not outside of your control. It is created by your thinking and if you want to start the process of learning how to change your desire the first thing you need to do is surface that thinking, and you do that by pausing. You do that by not immediately responding to the desire to drink, but pausing and allowing your thoughts to surface.

Noticing your thoughts is going to make a such a big difference because it will show you how much you are creating your desire and that it's not created outside of you, it's not created by this mysterious force, and that will make you feel so much more in control.

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Ok, so let me know how it goes. I am always really curious to hear from you how these different techniques are working. I love hearing from my listeners, and so if you want to send me an e-mail, if you want to let me know how it is going or if you have an idea for a topic that you want me to talk about, you can send me an e-mail at [podcast@rachelhart.com](mailto:podcast@rachelhart.com). Also if you have liked what you have heard today and you thought it was useful please rate me on itunes and leave some feedback. Thanks for listening everyone, 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 truly powered to take it or leave it. Head on over to [RachelHart.com/join](http://RachelHart.com/join) and start your transformation today.