

Ep #40: The Dark Side of #blessed



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With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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You are listening to the *Take a Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 40.

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.

Hey everybody, how are you doing? How is your day going? Have you been on social media today? If you have, you may have seen the word that we are talking about today. Today, we are talking about the word blessed. And if you're on social media, #blessed often seems like it's everywhere.

What it usually looks like is a picture of, "Here I am on vacation, on the beach, at this amazing place with these amazing people doing these amazing things, #blessed." Right, #blessed can feel a little bit, on social media, like it's a way to show off where you are, who you're with, what you're doing, but cloaking it in this concept of good fortune and acknowledging how lucky you are, so that you don't come off as too showy or like you're bragging too much.

But what I want to talk to you about today is a little bit different. It's still the word blessed, but it's different from how #blessed has appeared everywhere in the last couple of years. What I want to talk to you is actually how I hear so many of my clients, and I hear this over and over again, using the term blessed – not as a way to humbly brag about what they have in life, but as a way to signal to themselves, "Who am I to complain?"

Now this is really important for you to pay attention to, because if you start talking about how easy it is, if you start understanding how easy it is to use a drink as a way to get relief from a negative emotion – and that emotion might be stress or anxiety or annoyance, unhappiness, it can be anything. If you start to understand that, and then this idea of, "I'm so blessed," kicks in.

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If you start thinking, “Who am I to complain, I have so much good in my life, I have so much, I should just stop it.” That is a problem. When you start telling yourself, “I shouldn’t feel this way, I shouldn’t feel unhappy, I shouldn’t feel stressed, I shouldn’t feel anxious, I shouldn’t be annoyed or frustrated or lonely or bored,” whatever it is. And I definitely shouldn’t need to escape these feelings at the end of the day by using a drink to move away from them.

That’s when you run into a problem, because that is the surest way to sabotage change. Telling yourself that you have no right to feel the way you do will get in the way of the change you want to make with your drinking.

So I really think the concept of being blessed, which is so prevalent nowadays, it really is everywhere – it feels like in the last couple of years it’s just more and more in my consciousness, this idea of people talking about being blessed and #blessed and, you know, using that as a way to label social media and label what they’re doing.

Not only do I think that this concept is incorrect, but I really do believe, after hearing so many of my clients say it over and over to themselves, not as a way to brag about what they have, not as a way to be humble, but as a way to tell themselves, “Just stop it, stop complaining, you don’t have any right.” That will get in the way of change.

And I get this. So if you’re listening and you think, yeah, you know, sometimes I do think that, I get this. Because I will tell you, that for many years of my life, even though #blessed wasn’t in our vernacular, right, because we weren’t yet in the land of hash tags, I felt this way. I had a great education; I worked for two incredible human rights organizations in New York City.

I was climbing the ladder at each of those jobs, I had a rent stabilized apartment, which if you know New York, that is like the holy grail of living in New York City, having a rent stabilized apartment. I had friends, I had family that supported me, I had a boyfriend; what could I possibly have to

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complain about in life? But the truth was this, I was unhappy. I just didn't feel right. In fact, nothing ever really felt right; I felt off all the time. I wasn't comfortable in my own skin. I was constantly judging myself and comparing myself to all the other women around me, and I always felt like I was never good enough and I was never measuring up.

But here's the thing, not only was I aware of this unhappiness, but I was also telling myself at the same time that I shouldn't feel this way; I had so much. And think about it, I worked in human rights and social justice – I was confronted every day at work by people and issues that you think, "Okay, they really have a reason to complain." People whose lives had been upended by war and revolution, and here I was in New York City in my rent stabilized apartment feeling really sad for myself.

What was wrong with me? Why was I doing that? And so I told myself that I didn't have a right to feel the way that I did, and I resisted how I felt, I tried to push it away. And guess what, the more I resisted, the more I told myself I had nothing to complain about, the more the negative feelings that I had, they weren't getting resolved but they were actually growing. They were actually building, because I wasn't doing anything to start to change them and resolve them. I was just telling myself it wasn't okay that I felt this way.

The reason that I believe this happens is a really simple reason: we have been sold a bill of goods, and that bill of goods is really simple. What it says is, if you get the house and the marriage and the kids and the money and the body and the career, when you finally get these things, then you will be happy. Right, how many of you believe that, believe, "If I can just get that one thing, then I'm going to feel good, then I'm going to feel happy."

You know, I was actually reading The New Yorker this morning and I saw a cartoon that captured it perfectly. There was a caveman and a cavewoman sitting together in a cave looking miserable, and they were huddled close together surrounded by all these huge boulders. Their cave was just filled with boulder after boulder, and the man says to the woman, "I thought getting bigger rocks would make us happier, but I guess I was wrong."

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I just thought, “Yeah, that really captures it perfectly.” I just want you to consider for a moment how often in your life you have thought some version of this. “When I get the degree, when I get the job, when I get the spouse, when I get the house, when I have the body, then things will finally be right, then I will feel better.”

And you know what, you may have also thought, “When I figure out my drinking. When I figure out my drinking and it’s no longer an issue and I’m finally normal just like everybody else, then I’ll finally be happy.” But of course, it doesn’t pan out this way. The bar keeps moving. I think about this myself with how I viewed my appearance, especially as I was growing up.

I was just like the main character in the Judy Bloom book, *Are You There, God, It’s Me, Margaret*. I was just like Margaret, who was really, really freaked out by the fact that she really was the last one among her friends to develop. And I was the same way, puberty kicked in really late for me and my body was just not changing at the same rate as all the other girls my age, and I was obsessed by this.

I really remember thinking all the time, “When is it going to happen? When is finally going to kick in?” And I remember thinking to myself, “Oh my god, I would just give anything if I could just develop, if I could finally have a bust, then I would just be happy in the world.” I was fixated on it, and I really believed that when that would happen I would finally feel good.

And I did finally go through puberty. It wasn’t until really the end of 9th grade; I was always young in my grades. But you know what happened, you won’t be surprised, my attention just shifted elsewhere. It just shifted to other things about my appearance that I didn’t like and I thought needed fixing.

So once I finally, all of a sudden, went through puberty and had more of a womanly body, then my attention just went to what else was wrong, and my hair was too frizzy and I had all these pimples and my skin was too pale, I couldn’t get that nice tan that all the other girls got. It was just one thing after another. The bar kept moving.

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The message that happiness is found outside of us – you know, it doesn't appear out of nowhere. It's not like all of us just came up with this message and we all happen to be in the same boat. The reason that we have this message, the reason that we think this, the reason that we're so fixated on getting that one thing, changing that one thing and then we'll be happy is that we're getting this message all the time from advertisers.

It's true, and you know what, it makes sense because it is a brilliant way to sell us stuff. "Look at this happy person driving this beautiful car, look at this happy family in this beautiful house, look at this woman with this beautiful hair frolicking in her bikini." Right, look how happy and satisfied all of these people are. Don't you want to be happy and satisfied like them? These are the messages that we get all the time. Pick up any magazine, go online, turn on the TV, watch a movie.

Whatever it is, we're getting these messages all the time. But of course, if you know how the think-feel-act cycle works, you know that it doesn't work that way. What you have, or what you don't have, doesn't create how you feel; your thoughts create how you feel.

Your thinking is what creates your emotions, and there is nothing like getting that thing in life that you told yourself, "Oh if I just had that then I would be happy." There's nothing like getting that thing and then turning around and then finding yourself to be still unhappy, still unsatisfied. There's nothing like that to drive this point home.

It is not what you have that creates how you feel; it is what you are thinking that creates how you feel. Because no matter what you get, if you get the job, if you get the degree, if you get the spouse, if you get the apartment or the house or the children or the car, or whatever it is, you are still going to have to contend with all the chatter in your brain.

If you get that thing that you so desperately wanted but you haven't done anything to shift your thoughts, you haven't done anything to shift the thought, "I'm not good enough, I'm not smart enough, I'm not successful enough, I'm not measuring up, everybody else has more, I'm doing

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something wrong,” If you’re not doing anything to shift these thoughts then trust me, you’re not going to be happy.

No matter what you have, if your internal dialogue sounds like this, you’re going to be miserable. The problem is that most people never realize the role of their thoughts and how they feel because we get so many messages from so many different places that how we feel is a result of what we have.

So instead of focusing on what we’re thinking, we focus on just striving for that next thing, we focus on getting that next thing. And it is terrible to get the thing you want and turn around and realize, “Hey, I’m still unhappy, what happened? I don’t get it. I thought this was going to be the thing that would fix everything.”

And when that happens – which is a confusing thing to happen for most people because we’re so intent on this idea that getting these things, having these internal things is going to make us feel better – when that happens, it is not surprising that we’re like, “Okay, well what do I do now? I guess I’ll pour a glass of wine.”

Right, we just want to have some relief and we thought that this external thing was going to be the thing that gave us relief. We thought it was going to be the thing that made us feel better, and when that doesn’t work, then we turn to the other external things that actually can give our brain a hit of dopamine, can actually give us that temporary relief. And of course, that’s exactly what I did.

I didn’t understand how I could have so much and still be so unhappy. And I didn’t understand what to do with any of these feelings or any of these emotions. And so I just looked for a way to deal with how I felt. And that, for me, I unconsciously learned at a really young age, “Oh, I can pour a drink and then I’ll feel better.”

The only problem is that it did give me temporary relief, but the more I turned to using something outside of me, like a drink, to change how I felt,

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the less capable I became of handling my emotions on my own, and the more my negative repercussions grew.

The truth is this: having a beautiful home and beautiful kids and an amazing job, none of these things are going to insulate you from ever feeling bored or lonely or jealous or unhappy. Negative emotions are part of the human experience. We don't get to just take them out of our lives once we achieve or climb the next rung on the ladder.

And telling yourself, "Oh, but I'm so blessed, I shouldn't complain, I shouldn't feel this way, I have no right to feel this way or to complain," That is only going to backfire on you. So many of the clients I work with use the concept and the idea of being blessed and all of the things that they have as a way to beat themselves up.

They look at their lives and they think, "I've got the house and the marriage and the car and the job and the kids and the money, so why do I still feel this way? Something must be wrong with me." They use that idea to beat themselves up. And here's the thing, they don't want to admit to anyone, much less themselves, the fact that things don't feel right, the fact that they really feel off and unsettled and that they're not comfortable, because they don't know why that is.

So if you have ever told yourself that you're so blessed and you have no right to complain and you shouldn't feel this way, I want you to consider two really important things. The first is this: I'm not saying that you can't have and can't cultivate perspective on your life. I think perspective is really important. But perspective is not the same thing as telling yourself, "You are wrong to feel this way."

I will tell you that I remind myself and make a practice to reminding myself all the time that, "You know what, I am really lucky. I do have a lot of things." And doing the work that I did, working in human rights for a really long time, it was a really good way to develop that muscle. It was a really good reminder to focus on how I do have so much, I'm safe, I'm healthy,

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I've never gone hungry, I've never struggled to get clean water, I've never grown up in a war torn land, I've never struggled with shelter or schooling.

Those things have helped, in the past, to put my life in perspective, especially when I was in the midst of a pity-party, especially when I was telling myself, "This is just terrible, it's so unfair, I hate everything, nothing is right." That was a really useful time to use perspective because perspective helps you to step outside of your thoughts, to step outside of your thinking and observe them; observe your mind with a little bit of distance.

And that distance, that change in the direction or angle from which you see your thoughts, from which you see yourself, can help shift how you feel. And when your mind is running in circles about how terrible life is, this can be a really useful skill to have.

But having perspective and cultivating the skill of perspective does not mean that you aren't allowed to feel the way that you do. It does not mean that you don't get to have the full range of human emotions that include all the negative emotions as well. So I want you to keep that piece in mind because I think that's really important.

You can cultivate perspective, but it's very different than telling yourself you shouldn't feel this way, you have no right to feel this way. They are not the same thing.

And the second thing to remember is this: whatever you are feeling in any moment is never wrong. And you know what, this is so hard for people to believe, and I get it because it was hard for me to believe for a long time too, but it is never correct that you shouldn't feel a certain way, that you have no right to feel a certain way and that the way that you are feeling is wrong or incorrect.

The way that you are feeling just is. It is a piece of information, it is not good or bad, it is just your current reality. It is not wrong to feel sad or stressed or frustrated or jealous or angry. Whatever you are feeling is always information for you. And when you understand the think-feel-act

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cycle, you understand what that information is. The way you are feeling points to what you are thinking.

So when you say to yourself, oh I know I'm so blessed, I shouldn't think or feel this way, you are denying the fact that you do feel this way. Whatever you are currently feeling is your reality, and as long as you deny how you are feeling, as long as you continue to tell yourself that how you're feeling is wrong, you are just denying your own reality, and that denial of your own reality will create resistance. Fighting against how you feel will not change how you feel, it will just keep you at war with yourself.

It's okay to have any emotion, let it come up, allow it to be there, treat it as a piece of information. Use it as a way to understand what you are thinking in this moment, but don't swat it away. Don't swat it away with the thought, "I'm so blessed, I have nothing to complain about. I should just shut up."

If you are drinking at the end of the day to deal with your stress or your anxiety or your boredom or your loneliness, you know what, that's okay. If you are drinking when you go out, to deal with insecurity or awkwardness, that's okay too. Fighting these emotions, telling yourself that how you feel is wrong is not going to make it any better. The only way to start to shift and make it better is to acknowledge and to allow yourself to feel the way that you do instead of saying, you know, "I'm so blessed, I shouldn't feel this way."

All of that is just going to create resistance for you. And when you resist the situation, you can't actually look at it. Your current situation is this: you have a negative emotion, you don't know what to do with it, so your brain has gotten into the habit of turning to a quick and easy fix to change how you feel by having a drink. And the more you turn to a drink as a fix, the more you use it as a solution, the less capable you will become at dealing with these emotions on your own, and the more your negative repercussions will grow.

That's all that's happened here. Nothing has gone terribly wrong; you just have to allow yourself to feel the way that you feel. So stop using the idea

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of being blessed as a way to tell yourself you can't feel what you're feeling. Stop using it as a way to beat yourself up. Stop using it as a way to tell yourself that your emotions are wrong and just look at the reality.

The reality was this for me: I had a great education, I worked at incredible organizations, I had a great apartment, I had friends, I had a family who loved me, I was climbing the ladder at work, right, and I was still unhappy. That was my reality. But all of those things can coexist. What I had in my life did not negate how I was feeling in that moment, and the same is true for you.

Stop wielding the idea of being blessed as a weapon against yourself. You can be grateful for what you have, you can put your life into perspective, but you must actually acknowledge how you are feeling if you want to understand why you are continually moving away from it. That is the key.

Alright everybody, I really want you to think about this the next time you are scrolling through Instagram or Facebook or Twitter, or whatever your social media platform of choice is and think about how we use the idea of blessed and how you use it in your own life, and whether or not you're using it to deny your current reality. And if you are, just know that you don't need to do that, you just need to allow how you're feeling and use it as a piece of information, because that information, I promise, is going to be the key to help you change your drinking.

Alright everybody, see you next week.

Hey guys, if you want to go over to iTunes and leave a review about the podcast, if you're enjoying it, I would love it. But not only that – I'm giving everyone who does a free Urge Meditation. I will tell you, this meditation is super simple. All it takes is five minutes and a pair of headphones. If you are having an urge and you want a different way to handle it, just pop those headphones in, find a place where you can sit down undisturbed and teach your brain, retrain your brain this very simple method to make urges more tolerable. All you need to do is head on over to RachelHart.com/urge and input your information there.

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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 and start your transformation today.