

## Ep #127: Compare & Despair



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Rachel Hart**

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## Ep #127: Compare & Despair

You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 127.

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.

Alright everybody, welcome to the podcast. Now listen, sometimes the universe has really funny ways of sending you the perfect thing. I just sat down to start this recording and I checked my phone, I wanted to see what time it was, and I got a text message from a really, really good friend of mine named Megan from college and she sent me this message.

"I'm listening to your sister testify at the Massachusetts state house right now." Can you believe that? I love this so much. I love getting a text message like this. My sister is a total badass and the reason why I'm sharing it with you is because today, we're talking all about compare and despair, and how this is going to get in the way of changing the habit of drinking.

But here's the thing; compare and despair is a concept that appears in so many areas of your life, so yeah, you've got to clean it up in the area of how much you drink and constantly looking around and thinking to yourself, why can't I drink like everyone else? Why is everybody else a normal drinker and I'm the one with the problem?

You've got to clean it up there, but you also have to clean it up in all areas of your life because if you have listened to the podcast before, you have heard me talk about my older sister Rebecca. I love her dearly, but you know what? I spent so much time growing up, so much time, in fact all of my 20s feeling like I just don't measure up. She's so much better, she's so much smarter, she's so much more accomplished.

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I was in total compare and despair with her, and I will tell you that understanding this concept and doing the thought work around it has completely changed my relationship with her because now I can get a text message like that and hear that right now, as I am recording this podcast, she is testifying in front of the state legislator. She blows my mind. It's amazing.

I can get a text message like that and just feel amazing for her and just fully celebrate it and not go into a spiral like I would have for so many years in my life, down this kind of terrible beating myself up about how I was the sister that didn't measure up. That's what happens when you can release compare and despair, so I want to help you understand it today, both in terms of your drinking but also let's be free of it in all areas of our life because it really does change everything.

So, you have probably thought to yourself, why can't I drink like everyone else? This is the title of my book because this is what I used to think about all the time. When it came to my drinking and the habit that I developed around alcohol, I was in total compare and despair. I spent my 20s in full-blown compare and despair. Everybody's a normal drinker, I'm the only one with a problem.

You have got to break free of this if you want to change the habit. But more importantly, you've got to break free of this if you just want to enjoy life because it will pop up everywhere. When I was doing some research for this episode, I found this incredible example that is the perfect, perfect example of compare and despair with the Olympics.

So, I don't know about you, I really love watching the Olympics. I really love seeing humans perform amazing athletic feats that I would never be able to do. And as I was doing research on compare and despair, I found a really interesting study that was done on the happiness level of people who had won a gold medal, a silver medal, or a bronze medal.

So logically, you might think well, the person who's going to be the happiest will be the person who wins gold, and then the person who wins silver will

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be a little less happy and bronze will be the least happy, right? That makes logical sense, but it doesn't turn out to be that way.

So researchers looked at a couple different Olympics and they found time and time again, it didn't matter if it was men, it didn't matter if it was women, it didn't matter what the sport was, that bronze medalist almost always had bigger grins. They had bigger smiles on their face than the silver medal winners, and it has everything to do with compare and despair.

There is actually this really fantastic picture of the gymnast McKayla Maroney who won silver medal on the vault in 2012 and she has the most amazing unhappy, I am not impressed with where I finished face. She is standing on the podium and her brow is furrowed, her lips are pursed and they're kind of pushed off to one side. It is the perfect example of compare and despair.

Why isn't she happier than the bronze medalist? What gives? Why did researchers find this to be true over and over again that bronze medalists were actually happier than those who won silver? Because of who they were comparing themselves to. So think about it. You're on the podium and the silver medalist is thinking, god, I was so close. I was so close to capturing gold.

So they're comparing themselves to the gold medalist. One person who did slightly better. But the bronze medalist, her focus is totally different. She's just thinking about how lucky she is to be on the podium at all. She's thinking about the huge population of other competitors that she beat out just to make it on the podium. It's such a perfect example because it doesn't make sense logically.

We assume that the happiness would kind of just go down. Gold's the most happy and then a little less for silver, and the least amount of happiness for the bronze, but it doesn't work that way because of the phenomenon of compare and despair.

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So it brings me back to my book title, Why Can't I Drink Like Everyone Else. Where I was looking, where I was comparing were the people in my social circle. Now, mind you, there were people in my social circle who drank more than they should have been drinking, and who also worried a little bit about their drinking. But I was convinced that I was the worst.

Now, here's the other thing; there is so much research. It does not take a rocket scientist to find this information. So much research on how so many Americans and people all around the world struggle with how much alcohol they consume, and of drinking more than they want. Struggle to change the habit. So, something like one in six Americans report binge drinking at least once a week.

Now, if you don't know exactly what binge drinking is, that's four or more drinks in a sitting. And if some of you are like, oh phew, I only had three glasses, a serving of wine is five ounces. Most people are usually pouring around 10. Much, much bigger pours. And also note that this is self-reported. So every researcher agrees that this stat about binge drinking is incredibly, incredibly unreported.

So here's the thing; there is a lot of data out there that I could have easily found that would suggest you know what Rachel, you're not the only person struggling with this. But in my compare and despair, I saw myself as all alone. I saw myself as separate. And it's important to understand why that is. I did a whole podcast episode, which if you haven't listened to I really encourage you to check it out. It's all about rejection. It's episode 111, and why we try to avoid rejection.

And it's not just because the emotion of being rejected doesn't feel great. It's because avoiding rejection is something that the brain learned to do in order to help our chances of survival. So living in community, being part of a tribe, it helped you survive because the more people, the easier it was to find food, the easier it was to stay safe from predators, to stay warm, to build shelters from inclement weather.

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So rejection used to mean death. Thousands of years ago, that's what it would mean if you were rejected from the tribe. So there's an evolutionary reason why the brain wants to avoid it. It's not just because we don't like how it feels in our body, but the brain thinks that rejection means danger, and so human actually evolved to avoid it.

So the question is well, what are you doing to try to avoid rejection? And for most people, the answer is just maintain your status in the tribe and try to be accepted or acceptable, whatever you think that means as much as possible.

And so often, especially for those of you out there who are struggling right now with the habit of drinking, so often what happens is your belief system about drinking and not drinking and what that means and what that means about who you are and whether or not not drinking means that you're boring or weird or a killjoy and that drinking is normal and fun and what everybody does, that belief system will be so strong and your desire to avoid rejection will be so strong that you will try to do anything to maintain that status.

And you will keep going - this is what I did for a very long time. I knew that the habit that I had developed around alcohol, of drinking as a way to deal with feeling insecure and feeling awkward and coping with stress and trying to meet people, I knew that it wasn't serving me. But I so wanted to avoid rejection. I so wanted to just be accepted. I so intrinsically believed - although this is just wrong, that drinking was the only way to be normal that I just kept at the habit because I thought that it was at least preventing me from being cast out.

And this is where compare and despair comes in because it really has to do with your worth and how you measure your worth. When you are comparing and despairing, you are measuring your worth not as something that is intrinsic, not as something that you always have and can't lose, but as something that you have in relation to another person. This is what I did with my sister for decades really.

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My compare and despair was all about how I was not as worthy as she was. I've talked about it with you guys a lot. I've talked about my kind of younger days and my obsession with gold stars and then Girl Scout badges and then getting perfect grades. And that is true for a lot of you. A lot of you can relate to that because we are socialized at a very young age to measure our worthiness through external rewards.

But here's the thing; it starts with trophies and grades and the college that you get into, and then we don't just lose it. We don't just lose using external rewards as a way to determine in our own mind whether or not we're doing well, whether or not we're worthy. So as adults, it becomes what kind of card you have and how big is your house and where do you work and how much money do you make.

And the problem is if you base how you feel about yourself by external rewards, you have no choice. No choice but to measure yourself against others. And the problem is as long as you do this, you will always, always, always find someone who is doing better than you on some measure. And meanwhile, your brain will just fixate on compare and despair.

Oh, I'm not accomplished enough, I'm not attractive enough, I'm not disciplined enough, I'm not passionate enough, I'm not smart enough, I'm not wealthy enough. And it boils down to this believe that I'm not worthy enough. We keep believing that accumulating more and more signs of our worthiness is the way to feel better. But the only way to feel better is to challenge your thoughts, to challenge your belief system about what makes you worthy and where that worthiness comes from.

Because you know what - and this is something that I learned and I decided to believe and I keep deciding to believe, that you and me are worthy just because we exist. We are born with that worthiness and it doesn't go away. We are always deserving. And you know when it really doesn't go away? It doesn't go away if you're struggling with your drinking.

Figuring it out, figuring out this habit doesn't make you more worthy, and being in the middle of it, being kind of down in the trenches right now

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doesn't make you any less. Your worthiness has always been there. You have just clouded it up by thinking that you had to earn it with external accomplishments. You've been clouding it up. You've been unable to see it with all the compare and despair.

And I will tell you, in my personal life, there has been nothing like having a baby to really see this. You know, my little boy, he doesn't need to wake up every day and prove that he's worthy and prove that he deserves love and prove that he deserves care. He's just worthy and lovable. And when I coach women, I will tell you that pretty much everyone agrees with this.

Okay sure, Rachel, babies are worthy. Babies don't need to prove anything to deserve love. But then the question is okay, so if that's true, then it was true for you when you were born. So the question then that you need to answer is at what age did you lose that worthiness? At what age did your deservedness disappear? When did you have to start earning your worth? When did you start having to prove it?

Most people will tell me this; I guess it was when I learned right from wrong. And you know, I was coaching someone on this very thing recently and we were talking about how she had no tolerance for making mistakes. She hated being wrong. She hated making mistakes, and she found herself constantly wanting to be right and to do everything perfectly.

And as we were talking about this, I was explaining to her that the reason why she was stuck in this perfectionist trap of trying to do everything right and never making a mistake and never having any tolerance for failing or doing anything wrong was not because of the mistakes themselves, but because what she made them mean, what she made being wrong mean about who she was as a person.

Because what her brain was doing that, she didn't realize at first was turning I made a mistake into I am a mistake, or I did something wrong into I am wrong. She was making it mean so negative about herself, so of course she was always trying to avoid it. And I will tell you what I told her. We are not robots. We are human. We are messy. We are flawed, and we

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will make mistakes from here on out. That includes me and it includes you and it includes everyone. This is just part of the deal with being a human being.

We are constantly in a state of trying to evolve, trying to get to kind of our next level of humanness. That is what the game is all about. Let's keep growing. We don't reach some perfect state where we figured it all out and we just sit around being perfect and always doing everything right and never doing anything wrong. It doesn't work like that.

I want you to know that the things that you do that you wish you didn't right now, maybe it's finishing that entire bottle of wine, maybe it's coming home every night and having a drink, and the things that you have done in the past that you wish that you hadn't, maybe it's how much you drank last night, maybe it's how much you drank at somebody's wedding.

Either you can use these things as a stepping stone to understand yourself deeper and understand your brain better and how habits work, and use it to evolve to the next level of who you can become, or you can use it to beat yourself up. You can use these things to just whip yourself. That's what I did for years and years, just as a way to beat myself up over and over again. All the so-called mistakes, all my so-called imperfections. Everything I had done wrong, everything I wished I hadn't done.

I didn't understand that I could use it to become the next level of myself. So listen, here's how you know. If you're still not sure, here's how you know if you're stuck in compare and despair. You are constantly scanning to see how you measure up. Maybe it's compared to your siblings, maybe it's at work, maybe it's just when you walk into a room full of strangers. Am I the prettiest? The thinnest? The smartest? Did I go to the best school? Did I have the biggest house?

You're constantly scanning. You also might be stuck in compare and despair if you feel totally alone and isolated right now with your drinking. And what I'm talking about is alone and isolated with the struggle to change the habit. If you feel like you are the only person who drinks more than you

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want, and as crazy as that sounds, I 100% understand what that feels like because I really felt that way for a very long time, that's another sign.

If you often find yourself thinking well, at least I'm not as heavy as she is, or at least I'm not as impatient as that person in line, or at least I don't get as drunk as he does, sometimes compare and despair shows up in these kind of fleeting moments of trying to feel good about ourselves, trying to validate ourselves. It really doesn't matter if you're using your comparisons to criticize yourself or to criticize others.

If your goal is to determine right now if you are a winner or a loser in the game of life, then you're in compare and despair. You have missed the point because the point of life is not one big sorting game to see who comes out on top. There is no top. The point of life is just to decide that you can live a wild and extraordinary life any way you want to, that you can go after any dream that you have.

And you know what? What you do, it has no bearing on who you are. And what you do in comparison to someone else has no bearing on your worthiness because it's always been with you. It's always been completely intact. You're comparing and despairing right now first because your brain evolved to want to avoid rejection, and wanting to figure out hey, is this tribe going to accept me? That was one of the roles of compare and despair.

But now even though your survival isn't threatened, you're still sorting people into winners and losers. You're still trying to determine where you fit in. Am I acceptable? And the problem is just that you're asking the question in the first place. If you're asking yourself the question, am I acceptable? Am I measuring up? It means that you have an existing belief system about your lack of worth.

You're starting from a place of I am inadequate in some way, and that inadequacy is the problem. So your brain just keeps looking to prove this true. I talk about this all the time. This is what the brain likes to do. It wants to find evidence for what you already believe. That helps you be efficient.

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Instead of seeing how you are totally adequate and completely acceptable, you're scanning for the opposite so that you can prove the opposite true, even though it feels terrible.

I did this for so long. Constantly scanning, constantly looking for how I wasn't measuring up and I was inadequate. It felt horrible. But I didn't understand that my brain wanted to be right, even though it was hurting me, even though it felt terrible because being right, finding evidence for what I already believed, which was yeah, I don't measure up, that was the path of least resistance.

I like thinking of it like this; feeling inadequate is totally okay. It's actually something that I can use to propel myself, to motivate myself to stretch further and to see what else I can do and what else is out there. Because you know what? If I was 100% content, I don't know that I'd be doing this podcast. Maybe I'd just be sitting on my couch feeling content.

Feeling like oh god, I'm not enough, instead of seeing it as oh gosh, that must be the truth, you can see it as a call for more. You can see it as a call for hey, what else can I do? How else can I grow? How else can I evolve? Of course your brain's believing you're not enough. If you were, then what else would you do all day? You'd be totally content.

But humans have the desire for more. That desire used to help us survive, and now that we're not needing that desire to help us survive, to help us find the food and the water and shelter, we can harness that desire for something else, and that is how to become the next version of ourselves.

You know, one of my clients said recently, I've been thinking this my whole life that I can fix who I am by adding a substance. Something will make me better. Whether it is coffee or medicinals or booze or cigarettes, it's always something else. Something else that I can add because I'm not enough. And then I thought to myself, what if that weren't true? What if everything I need is already inside of me to do what's right for me?

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And I got chills when she said this. What if everything we need is already inside of us? What if we are enough? What if we are exactly what we need? I couldn't open myself up to those thoughts for such a long time, but they're so true. If you are struggling with your drinking, let me tell you, you and me and thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions of people, so what?

Are you going to just go into compare and despair and only look to the people who are doing better? Or are you going to look for the common humanity in all of us? Because I will tell you this; the more that I do this work, the more that I have people reach out who don't struggle with drinking but say, you know what, everything you say in your podcast really resonates for me with food, or around sex, or work, whatever it is, I just see over and over again that people struggle.

And if it's not with drinking, it's with food. If it's not with food, it's with money. If it's not money, it's work or thinness or exercise or promotions or house renovations. Whatever it is, so many people are just caught on this treadmill of trying to do anything to prove that they are worthy and then when they have the house and the family and the job and the car, they get the things and they still feel inadequate, then they try to numb those feelings of inadequacy with whatever they can find.

Your struggle might be alcohol right now. It's something else for another person, but there is a common humanity in all of us. You can let this be the key to propel you forward. So, stop wondering why you can't drink like everyone else. Stop the comparing and the despairing because you can see now, you don't need it. It's not helping. This is not one big sorting game.

It will sap all of your mental energy spending all of your time trying to figure out oh god, how can I be more like her? How can I finally measure up? How can I finally prove myself? It will sap all of your mental energy, and you know what? You won't have it left to direct changing the habit because what you really need to understand is the problem that drinking is solving for you right now.

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If you understand that and you learn how to solve that problem in another way, that is where you will find freedom. Alright everybody, my sister is probably still testifying right now and I am so damn proud of her. I love you Rebecca. That's it for today. I will see you guys next week.

Hey guys, if you're finding this podcast helpful, and I really hope you are, I would love if you would head on over to iTunes and leave a review. And as a special thank you, I've updated and expanded my free urge meditation giveaway. I've created two audio meditations plus a brand-new workbook that will teach you a different way to respond to the urge to drink.

The meditations are super simple. All it takes is five minutes and a pair of headphones, and each one now comes with a follow up exercise in the workbook to help you dig deeper and really retrain your brain when it comes to the habit of drinking. So after you leave a review on iTunes, all you need to do is head on over to [rachelhart.com/urge](http://rachelhart.com/urge), input your information, and I'll make sure you get a copy of both meditations plus the workbook in your inbox.

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.

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