

Ep #337: Unfulfilled Desire



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With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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Ep #337: Unfulfilled Desire

You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, Episode 337.

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, everybody. Welcome back. We're talking about desire, today. We're going to talk about how we respond when our desire appears, how we try to manage it, and what you can start doing instead. Because if you want to change your relationship with alcohol, you have to change your relationship not only to desire but also unfulfilled desire.

Unfulfilled desire is part of life, it's not something that we can avoid. And it's important to learn a new way to interact with it. Now, I've been thinking about desire a lot lately. I've been thinking a lot about wanting something and then not getting it, and how we are taught to cope with that. How we're taught to cope with our unfulfilled desires.

Because it is coming up all the time. All the time, with my oldest son; he is almost five. And it's actually kind of crazy because when I think about it, when I started this podcast, I did not have children. And here I am now, two boys. My oldest is almost at his fifth birthday. And we are at this point right now with him, where his desire for things is really intense.

I know some of you are listening, with much more experience, and you're like, "Okay, Rachel, just wait. Wait until you have a 10-year-old or a 15-year-old. You have no idea." But right now, it is very intense. We are spending a lot of time trying to navigate this.

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

Ep #337: Unfulfilled Desire

He really wants things badly, and he wants it now. He negotiates with us constantly. He makes all of these promises, "Please, please, please. I promise I will not ask again. I won't ask for more," that he does not keep. And he loses his mind when he doesn't get what he wants.

And so, I have been trying to help him navigate all of this. Honestly, I've been trying to help myself navigate all of this. Because I have kind of a dual role, in that I'm doing the work to not only help him but also doing the work to understand my own desire and my desire for him to behave a certain way.

Sometimes I kind of think I need more help than he does. Because when he starts asking for something that I either don't think that he should have, or I don't want him to have, or I think he's already had too much of it, or I'm just annoyed that he's asking, my internal dialogue, that knee-jerk response, I watch it unfold. It's, "Stop. Stop asking. Stop bothering me. Just stop." And it's so fascinating for me to watch that internal response.

Now listen, just so we're clear, sometimes it's not just internal. Sometimes, I also immediately come back with that. It's really fascinating for me to watch that unfold. I'm not always a curious observer. But I really do have the ability, I really have built this muscle of 'if I can't be curious in the moment, I can be curious after the fact.' I can find that little bit of fascination of 'Hey, what's going on with him? And what's going on with you? And how is all of this working together?'

That's what I'm really hoping, and trying to help all of you who listen, cultivate with yourself. It's this fascination, this curiosity, not only about your desires but about your response to your desires. Curiosity about the desire to drink, and fascination about why an unanswered urge, why that's something you really want to avoid. These are things that are so essential for you to develop.

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

Ep #337: Unfulfilled Desire

So, this has all been going on in our family right now. And what's happening with my son, he wants iPad, he wants treats, he wants toys, he just wants all the things. And part of me has so much compassion for this kid. I get it. I also want what I want when I want it. That's the human experience, figuring out how to manage our desires and navigate our wants. And not let our desires for immediate gratification rule our existence. It's everybody's work.

Part of me has compassion, and part of me, at times, also wants to strangle him. But I'm able to get curious and fascinated. I think the reason why I'm able to get into this place or find curiosity and fascination... Maybe not right in the moment, maybe after the fact. Maybe it takes a little time or reflection... is because of all of the curiosity and fascination I developed around my own desires.

One of my favorite questions that I use with myself all the time, I offer to people all the time when I'm working with them, is what else might you be desiring right now, in addition to a drink? What else do you want? People have to stop and think about it. I have to stop and think about it. Do you want closeness? Do you want rest? Do you want company? Do you want to be alone? Do you want excitement? Do you want quiet? What is it?

It's such a powerful question to just say, "What else might I be desiring besides this drink? What might be underneath this desire?" But listen, that question, when it comes to dealing with my four-year-old; almost five, he's always reminding me, almost five. When it comes to dealing with him, that level of awareness, I don't really think he has that capacity yet.

So, what I've been doing instead, is a technique that I have long been practicing with myself. When he's freaking out, I'm saying no to something that he wants and his intensity is rising, if I'm not careful, my intensity is going to rise right along with his, right? We're just going to get more and more intense, and lock our horns and get nowhere.

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

Ep #337: Unfulfilled Desire

Instead, what I've been trying to do with him is just acknowledge that he wants something that I'm saying no to and that that's difficult. Right? So, when he's been freaking out, I've been trying to normalize the freakout for him just by saying, "Listen, buddy, I know. I get it. It is really hard to want something and not get it. It's hard for me, too. This is a difficult thing."

And this acknowledgment piece, I think we're all so quick, as adults, to just want to skip past this with ourselves. Right? It's like, okay, I'm not a child, why do I need to acknowledge this? Why do I need to acknowledge that it's difficult?

But the reason why I think that we bypass this step is because we so immediately go to the place, especially when it comes to desires that we think we have too much of, we often go immediately to this place of 'I shouldn't want it. I know it's bad for me.'

Or we go to the place of 'well, I shouldn't want so much of it. I shouldn't want it so intensely. And the fact that I want so much of it, and it's hard for me to say no, it must mean that something is wrong with me.' We're so quick to immediately jump to logic and shame. And believing that logic and shame are the solutions for our unanswered desire.

Guess what? Logic and shame are terrible, terrible motivators. We are not taught this; we are taught the opposite. "They should be great motivators. You should know better. You should know this thing's not good for you. You should learn from your mistakes."

One of the most freeing things for me was to understand that I had a lower brain. I had a part of my brain that did not care one bit about logic. That's not what it was designed to do. It was not designed to sit around weighing the pros and cons of something. It was designed to seek out rewards in my environment. Then remember that reward, and then remind me to hey, go back. Let's get it again.

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

Ep #337: Unfulfilled Desire

That was incredibly freeing for me to understand. Like, “Oh, that's in my brain? Part of my brain, that's what it does? I have this and everybody has this? Oh, okay. Maybe I'm not so crazy, after all.”

Because the thing is, when we're trying to tell ourselves, “You should know better. You should know it's not good for you. You should be able to learn from these mistakes,” when we're trying to logic ourselves out of desire, the problem is that that's all well and good. But no amount of logic is going to change or dampen your emotional experience, or you're upset by not getting the thing that you want.

Now, you may logically know that something is not good for you, but you're still going to feel disappointed. You might even feel a little angry that you can't have it. And you're not going to be able to logic yourself out of the emotional experience. I say this as someone who spent decades trying; decades, trying to do this.

The fact of the matter is, by the time you have recognized that you're having an emotional experience... I'm always saying to people when I'm working with them, “Okay, so how did that make you feel?” They're often like, “What are you talking about? I don't know.” But we are having an emotional experience alongside it.

By the time we recognize it, the genie's already out of the bottle. The hormones and the chemicals connected to that emotional state, they're already coursing through your system. Your body has to be able to come back to homeostasis, right? And that's not going to happen by snapping your fingers. It takes a little bit of time.

So, I really like to think of it like this, by the time I'm aware that I'm having a negative emotion, my brain has already released all the chemical components connected with that negative emotion, right? People will say like, “Oh, yeah, I got hot with anger.” Yeah, you are hot. Because the

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

Ep #337: Unfulfilled Desire

adrenaline your brain releases narrowed the blood vessels in your body to get more blood to your heart and your muscles, which increases your body heat.

I don't care how sound your argument is, it's going to take time to reduce your temperature. It's going to take time to bring your body back into homeostasis. Logic is not the solution. Logic cannot expand a narrowed blood vessel in your body. You're not going to be able to talk yourself out of this emotional experience once you're having it.

You can, however, use words and language and your prefrontal cortex to help manage your response to the emotional experience. This, by the way, this ability, comes in really handy when you're annoyed to say no to that drink. Or you're feeling overwhelmed by the urge. Or you're very awkward in a situation where everyone is drinking and you're saying no.

But telling yourself that you *shouldn't* have the emotional experience, that you shouldn't feel this way, or that you're bad or wrong to feel how you feel when you have an unfulfilled desire, that's actually illogical. That's the thing that doesn't make any sense. Logic is not the solution in these moments. It's not the solution to unanswered desires.

Neither is shame. Right? The two things that we're taught to believe should be great motivators to change our behavior, they actually backfire. Because, especially with shame, now you feel bad for wanting something that you tell yourself you're not supposed to want. And what does shame do?

When we feel shame, we're much more likely to turn away. We don't want to look at this thing, because we now think it's bad or it's wrong, and it shouldn't be there. When we are in this place of shame, it's very difficult, if not impossible, to be curious or fascinated.

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

Ep #337: Unfulfilled Desire

Now, I know some of you listening will hear me talk about, why think shame and shame-based approaches don't work. And I know some of you are like, "Oh, but I think maybe it does work for me." I thought this, too. Because there were moments in my kind of journey with alcohol, there were moments when I would wake up and I would be so embarrassed or so regretful. I would feel so bad.

I would decide, in that kind of swamp of embarrassment and regret and shame, I would decide, "Oh, my God, Rachel, you have to do something." And you know what? Maybe my drinking would change for a while. But not for long.

This is the thing, for all of you listening clinging to the idea that shame works. Okay, maybe it works to change your behavior for a while. But if it worked consistently, if it created lasting change, you wouldn't be here. You wouldn't be listening to this podcast. Right? That's the illusion, that shame is going to be this great solution to change.

It might create temporary behavior change, but I don't think it's effective at creating lasting, transformative change. Because listen, shame, the whole kind of genesis of it, is 'something is wrong with me.' Right? It's not, "I did a bad thing." It's, "I'm bad." That thought, "I'm bad. Something is wrong with me," that thought feels awful. It feels awful.

And guys, what's the appeal of alcohol? Why have humans had this long-standing relationship with fermented beverages? Because they change how we feel in a positive way, right? Because it's this thing that we're like, "Oh, this is how I feel good."

So, when you're feeling awful, and there is something out there that will at least temporarily make you feel good, or maybe just make you forget, guess what's going to happen? I will tell you this too, just because I have been working with people for so long now, I cannot tell you the number of

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

Ep #337: Unfulfilled Desire

people that I have talked to who have gone years and years without drinking. And they are still carrying around so much shame. Still believing that how much they drank, their response to their desire, was a sign that something was wrong with them.

And the problem is, that no amount of time away from alcohol absolves them from this shame, because they're caught in this place. And by the way, I speak from experience. I was here, too. I'd be caught in this place of 'okay, fine, now I'm being good. But what about all that time when I was being stupid and bad?'

When you're convinced that your drinking is an indication that you are bad or stupid or wrong, then there will always be this fear that you're carrying around that's like, "Oh, God. What if the bad me comes back." There will always be this sense, deep down, that you can't really trust yourself. And living in fear of something, not believing that you can be trusted, feels awful. Feeling awful is not the key to lasting change.

Believing your desire is illogical or wrong, when you are in that place, it means that you will never want to acknowledge it. And if you don't want to acknowledge it, you're not going to be able to make peace with it. You're always going to be at war. You're always going to be afraid.

As opposed to, "Oh, I'm having this desire. It's not stupid. It's not bad. It's not wrong. It's not a sign that something is wrong with me. This desire is here. And you know what? It's hard for me not to have the thing I want, and that's okay." That is so different, because all of a sudden, you can relax a little bit.

I watched this happen with my son, right? It happened just this morning. We're trying to get him to stop watching *Paw Patrol* and go to swim class. He was like, "Listen, people, *Paw Patrol* is not over." Arguing with him, like, "Listen, we've got 10 minutes. We paid for these lessons. By the way, this

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

Ep #337: Unfulfilled Desire

is a safety issue. You have to improve your swimming,” he does not care. That does not matter.

Yelling at him, and telling him that he should stop yelling at us, or that he should listen to us more, or that he should be thankful because not everybody gets to go to swim class, and telling him that he really just needs to behave better, that doesn't work great, either. I mean, both of these techniques, they can kind of get him to swim class. But arguably, it's made the entire experience of him not getting the thing that he wants, it's made it a worse experience for him, and for us, by the way.

And so, the thing that I've been trying to do with him, when we have these moments, and we have these moments a lot. I've been trying to just be like, “Listen, kid, I know. I get it. I know you're disappointed. Of course, you're disappointed. It's disappointing to stop doing something that you want to do or to not be able to do the thing that you want to do. It's disappointing when I tell you no.”

This is hard for kids, and it's hard for adults. It is hard not to get what you want. But here's the thing I know too, it's a skill we've all got to practice. I'm still practicing it. It's a muscle you've got to build. We're building a muscle right now. And I'll tell you this, he does not magically transform into a compliant four-year-old. Don't get me wrong. But I do watch him soften just a little bit.

And in that softening, there is space to figure out ‘Okay, so what are we going to do next?’ And sometimes, when there is time, what we do next is I say, “I'm just going to sit here with you. I'm going to sit here with you while you're feeling really disappointed and really angry. I'm just going to be with you.”

But you know what? Sometimes there is no time to sit with him. Sometimes it's like, yeah, we've got to get to this class. And then it's like, okay, so what

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

Ep #337: Unfulfilled Desire

can we do now? Maybe I can just reiterate, “I love you, and I'm going to hold your hand while we walk downstairs. I'm going to help you get in the car. I'm going to give you a kiss.”

I want you to think about what this would look like for you and your desire, right? When that desire, that urge appears, instead of immediately turning to logic, ‘I shouldn't want this,’ or shame, right? “Why do I want this? It's wrong that I want this.” What would it be like if you just acknowledged what was happening, and acknowledged that it was hard?

What would it be like to have this very different inner dialogue with yourself of, “Hey, you know what? I know you want this. I know you had a hard day, or you're afraid that saying no is going to be weird. I get it. I know that you want it. And I know that it's hard, and here's what we're going to do instead.”

“We're going to choose to do something else instead. We're going to choose to say no. We're going to choose to sit with the urge and see if we can watch it pass. We're going to choose to move towards awkwardness, and teach our brain, you know what? It's survivable. That too, just like an urge, will pass on its own.”

Whatever your “instead” is, what are you going to choose to do? You've got to put your mind to work. This is such a different response than ‘no’. What are you going to do instead if you're not going to give in? If you're not just going to knee-jerk to ‘no’ and tell yourself that you can't have it, and now you feel even kind of more annoyed, and maybe disempowered, what are you going to do instead?

How would you answer that question when your desire appears? This is why I love the question: What else are you desiring right now? Because it gives you something to start thinking about. It gives your brain a place to

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

Ep #337: Unfulfilled Desire

go, rather than just wrestling with your desire and wishing that it wasn't there, and feeling annoyed that it's there or pissed off.

I really want you to try this out. I know you want this. And we're going to choose to do something instead. I know it's hard not to have the thing that you want, and we're going to make a different choice. I will sit here with you. I won't make you feel stupid or wrong for this desire. I will kind of symbolically 'hold my hand.'

But just that acknowledgment can create this little bit of softening, this little bit of space inside of you, so don't immediately go right into saying yes. It's such a powerful thing to start trying out with yourself.

And before we go today, I do just want to add, because I was giving an example about my kids and I talk about this a lot inside the membership, I think it's really, really important for all of you parents out there, when you hear me talk about these things, for you not to get some sort of idealized vision of how I am parenting my kids.

And believe that I, obviously, because I'm a coach, I always have this zen, calm, compassionate approach. I do not. I lose my mind. I yell. I get angry. I say things that I wish I could take back. I forget all these tools in the moment and only remember them after the fact. But here's the thing, I also truly, deeply believe and know that my goal is not to be a perfect parent. Right?

Because the moment that I think that I did something wrong, I believe that I was bad, that I'm falling down on the job, that's the moment that I go into shame, and I shut down curiosity. I let myself be two things at once. I let myself be messy as a parent and also think that I'm an amazing, great parent too. Both of those things can be true.

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

Ep #337: Unfulfilled Desire

And so, I just want to add that because it comes up a lot when I'm coaching people, especially when I start talking about kids. It comes up as this idea of, "Ugh, God, another thing I'm doing wrong." You're not doing anything wrong.

But think about this, think about how you can just acknowledge your own unfulfilled desire. And change your response to it with something as simple, "That desire appears. And instead of saying no, instead of making it mean something, saying, I know you want this. I get it. It's hard to say no to the things that we want. But here's what we're going to choose to do, instead."

All right, that's it for today. I will see you all 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 empowered to take it or leave it. Head on over to www.RachelHart.com/join and start your transformation today.

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