

Ep #422: What to Do When Temptation Strikes



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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

Ep #422: What to Do When Temptation Strikes

How many times have you told yourself, today I'm not going to drink, or I'm going to limit myself, only to have your good intentions fall apart later in the day? Listen, there is a very specific reason why this happens, and it has nothing to do with there being something wrong with you.

This is episode 422, and I'm going to explain exactly what you need to practice when temptation strikes.

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, welcome back. So in the last episode, we were talking all about why your good intentions fail. Right? So you wake up and you say, today's going to be different, and I'm not going to drink, or I'm only going to have one glass and then I'm going to be done. But then the further you get from the morning, the more your commitment starts to waver. It is something that every single person I have ever worked with experiences. This is a very, very normal thing.

So what I'm going to do in today's episode is give you the next step for what to do when your commitment starts to waver. And this has nothing to do about figuring out how to just be more disciplined or have more willpower or connect to your compelling reason. I'm going to be talking about something very, very different than you're expecting. But I do just want to reiterate, if you haven't listened to episode 421, go back and listen to that episode because it's really important that you just have the basic framework.

If you're finding that your good intentions are falling apart, there's nothing wrong with you. You are not the problem. The problem is this misunderstanding that frankly we all have about what good intentions are. So I talk about in episode 421 how good intentions really are just a vision

Ep #422: What to Do When Temptation Strikes

without a plan. So they're a vision for how you hope to show up later in the day, but you haven't told your brain how exactly you're going to follow through on those good intentions, and that's where things start to break down.

Now, I talk about in episode 421 a little bit why this happens. We do this, we give ourselves a vision without a plan because we think we shouldn't need a plan. I told myself this for the longest time. I was so stuck in this mindset of, Rachel, you should just know better by now. I didn't feel good about how much I was drinking. I knew that I hated waking up feeling embarrassed about what I did the night before when I was drunk. I deeply wanted to change, and I really convinced myself that all of that should have been enough.

I told myself, if you know that you don't like the consequences of your drinking, right? Then you should know better. But what I want you to consider is that knowing that you don't like the consequences of something is not the same as knowing how to say no to the behavior or shift the behavior, or knowing how to show up differently with your cravings. That's what we're going to be getting into in this episode. We're going to be talking about the how. Because the how that I teach is unlike any how that you've ever been given.

And I think we need to acknowledge that. We need to acknowledge that for the most part, we aren't given a how. Right? What's drilled into our head is just say no. Or if you didn't say no, and you did something dumb, then learn from your mistakes. That's really all that we are told.

I was preparing for this episode and I was thinking about my two young boys. So the youngest is going to turn three in a couple months, and he loves this children's book called Frog and Toad Together. There's a bunch of Frog and Toads, but this one particular copy, Frog and Toad Together, he loves, loves, loves one of the stories in it. Frog and Toad, if you're not familiar, it was written in the early 70s. I remember reading these books when I was a kid.

Ep #422: What to Do When Temptation Strikes

They're really lovely stories about a friendship between a frog and a toad. And I will say that Frog is kind of chill, and Toad is less chill. He's a little nervous, a little uptight. He worries a lot. And I joke with my husband that we are a little bit like Frog and Toad. It's a little bit of reflection of our relationship, but also a reflection of our upbringing because, you know, I am the anxious, serious New Englander, and he's a kind of chill, relaxed. Don't worry, Rachel, it's all going to work out. It's all going to be fine Californian.

And I will just say, you know, I really benefit from having a dose of chill in my life. I could use that quite a bit. But I will tell you, sometimes it really drives me nuts. Sometimes I, in my head, I'm like, you are not worried enough, honey. And now, because you're not worried enough, I'm going to have to be doubly worried to make up for your lack of worry. So anyways, I love Frog and Toad. My boys love the books, and my littlest is in this Frog and Toad phase, and he's obsessed with this one story called Cookies.

Cookies has a lot to do with willpower, and I don't know why he's so into it right now, but he wants me to read it to him over and over again. And, you know, pretty much across the board for all of these books, I love the messages. But this is the one story that I'm like, oh yeah, I don't really like this message. So I'm going to give you a little summary of this story because I think it really pertains to so much of what we unconsciously learn about how to deal with our cravings.

So, in the story, remember, Frog and Toad are friends. Toad bakes some really good cookies. He's super excited about them. So he runs to Frog's house to share the cookies. Frog loves them too, and they're sitting there in Frog's house with this kind of bowl full of cookies, and they're just eating all of them. And one after another, they just eat and eat and eat. And soon Frog is like, I really think we should stop. And Toad agrees. But while they're agreeing that they should stop, they just still keep eating.

And then they start saying, you know, oh, this will be our last cookie. And then they have another cookie. And they say, this will be our one very last cookie. And then they keep eating more. It doesn't work. They keep going

Ep #422: What to Do When Temptation Strikes

back to the bowl. And Toad freaks out a little bit and he's like, we really got to stop eating these cookies. And Frog is like, okay, you're right. We got to find ourselves some willpower. Now, Toad has never heard of willpower. And so Frog explains, it's just trying really hard not to do something.

And so Frog decides that in order to find their willpower, they're going to put the cookies in the box and close up the box. But Toad is like, we can just open the box. This is not going to work. So Frog ties a string around the box. And Toad again is like, I mean, I can just untie the string. Like this is not going to work. So Frog gets out a ladder and he puts the box on a really high shelf. And he's like, okay, problem solved. We're not going to eat any more cookies. And Toad is like, dude, I'm just going to climb the ladder and take down the box and cut the string and I'm going to eat the cookies.

And so Frog is like, okay, okay, you're totally right. And he takes the box of cookies and he goes outside and he calls to all of the birds and he says, hey birds, we got some cookies for you. And he dumps all the cookies out and the birds eat all of them. And Frog is very happy with himself. He's like, look how much willpower we have. And Toad is not so happy. And Toad is like, you know what? I'm just going to go home and bake a cake.

So, I will tell you, I do not know why my 2-year-old is so obsessed with this story right now, but he really is. We read it every night. And it's the one story that I really don't like that much because the message is, well, if you can't control yourself around something, then the only solution is to remove the source of temptation. And I think that this story about the cookies is like a little microcosm of the bigger message that we get all the time, and we get throughout our lives, which is you should be able to control yourself. And if you can't control yourself, then you can't be around whatever is tempting you.

Now, the problem with this message that Toad, I think really helps us see very clearly is, you know, we've all got free will. And so now the cookies are gone because the bird ate all of them, but he's just going to go home and he's going to bake a cake. He is still at the mercy of his cravings. And I

Ep #422: What to Do When Temptation Strikes

think that this is really, really similar to what happens to a lot of us with our drinking.

Right? So I remember feeling like part of me just didn't have control. And I did not like that feeling of not being in control. And the only thing that I knew to do, the message that I had been given throughout my life was, okay, so then you need to not be around it. We get this message in so many different ways. But that's really what we're told. It's like, if you can't control yourself, well, first, it's like, you should be able to control yourself. But if you can't, then you need to not be around the thing.

And I understand partly why society gives us this message. If you think about how something that you have a lot of desire around can feel very necessary. So I think a lot in my own life about how there was a point where just drinking felt like it was woven into every aspect of my life. So, you know, you might identify with this. You might kind of feel like this is what I do when I get home, I fix myself a drink, or this is what we do when we watch the game, we have a beer. This is what I do when I'm at a fancy restaurant or when I see friends or on the weekends. When it feels like alcohol is everywhere and part of everything, then saying no can really seem impossible.

And so a lot of the advice, which is, okay, just, you know, get it out of your house, like pour it all down the drain. Don't go to the bar, don't see certain friends, don't be around your triggers. I understand where this advice is coming from. I don't think people offer this advice out of malice. I think that it is very connected to this idea of, listen, if you could just have this period of time away, it could be so transformative for you. I think this is really the basis behind Dry January. It can be so transformative, so profound to have 30 days without alcohol, especially if the 30 days seemed really impossible or really insurmountable.

And so sometimes, you know, just giving someone the experience of like, hey, this is what it's like. And letting them see, maybe it was challenging at first, but then it got a lot easier. And maybe you had all of these stories

Ep #422: What to Do When Temptation Strikes

about how you're going to really, really miss it, and maybe you didn't miss it as much as you thought you would.

And by the way, you might have had a lot of health benefits. You might have had less anxiety. You might have been sleeping better. Right? When we remove alcohol or really anything that feels hard to manage. So that can be sugar, it can be processed food, it can be social media, it can be your Amazon shopping cart. When you remove something for a period of time, you can have some profound realizations around it.

And so I get why society so often gives us the advice of like, just avoid temptation. You know, don't be around any of your triggers. Just make sure that, you know, you don't expose yourself to situations of temptation. The problem, however, is that it's just not a good long-term strategy. Yes, the insight that you get can be profound. But it is very, very, very unlikely. I will say it's impossible to set up your life, to structure your life so that you will never be tempted, so that you will never have a craving. It's just not how life works.

And I will say in addition to this, because so many people who want to change their relationship with alcohol don't want to stop drinking forever. They don't want to give it up forever. That this advice is particularly detrimental. Because what happens is it's like, okay, so like I proved to myself that I could go 30 days and not drink. But then you reintroduce alcohol. I mean, I think about all the times that I would do this, right? I so often in my own journey thought like, okay, so I just I have to make sure that I'm not around anything that's going to be a trigger. And I have to prove to myself. This is what I believed for a long time. I have to prove that I can say no for a certain period of time.

Well, then what would happen when I would reintroduce alcohol? There would often tend to be this rebound effect. So sometimes what it would look like for me is that, you know, that first time of reintroducing it, I had just been, you know, white knuckling it and kind of, you know, willpowering my way through that the first time I was like, okay, Rachel, you're finally

Ep #422: What to Do When Temptation Strikes

allowed to drink. I would go really overboard. I would drink a lot. Other times what would happen, maybe I would start to more slowly reintroduce it, but very quickly I would find that I had quickly gotten back into my old patterns.

So using willpower and avoidance, yes, these tools can give you insight and clarity into what your life is like without something, but it doesn't teach you how to actually manage the thing that you're craving, the thing that you're desiring, your excuses, your triggers, the temptation. All you're learning how to do is to remove the source of temptation and then keep saying no and keep saying no and keep saying no. And this is just not how change at the deepest level works. It's a very superficial kind of change. And we know this because we see this.

You probably have either had this experience in your own life or you've seen people that you know have this experience. People can go long periods of time abstaining from something. That can be abstaining from alcohol, it can be abstaining from drugs, it can be abstaining from, you know, certain categories of food. They can go long periods of time and then they give in. Then they go back.

And I think it's important for us to have a different conversation about why that happens because so often the conversation is like, well, see, you're never going to be cured of this. It becomes this kind of conversation in which we tend to look at the person's brain as the problem. But what I think is really going on here, one of the key reasons why this happens is because we aren't actually taught what to do when a craving appears other than to run and hide from it.

And if you think about what you have been taught in your life in regards to temptation, and not just around alcohol, but anything that feels tempting, I think that we are given the message that Frog was sharing, which is I need to create barriers between me and the source of my temptation. That's what he was trying to do. He was going to put it in a box and then, okay,

Ep #422: What to Do When Temptation Strikes

that's not going to work. I'm going to tie a string around it. That's not going to work. Okay, I'm going to put it on the highest shelf.

But as Toad points out, you can put up all the barriers you want, but we've got free will. Right? So ultimately, we can just simply go get the thing that we're desiring. Putting up barriers doesn't actually teach us anything different in terms of how we are relating to the thing that we are craving.

So what I'm suggesting is that instead of putting up barriers against your cravings, what I'm suggesting is you take the barrier down. So instead of being afraid of your cravings, and instead of having that knee jerk of, well, either I give in or I have to go to war with them, or I have to run away from them. What I'm suggesting is you move towards the craving.

Because if you are willing to move towards it, then all of the sudden, this part of you that desires something that you're like, I wish I didn't desire it so much, right? Or I wish I didn't desire it at all. Or this part of you that desires more and never feels satisfied. If you are willing to move towards this part of you, it stops being this part of you that you have to fear. Moving towards the craving is teaching your brain, I don't need to be afraid of this part of me. I don't need to shame myself. I don't need to hate this part of me. I don't need to wish that it was never there. Because maybe I can do something totally different. I can embrace it even if, even if I look at my desires and I see like, it's really not serving me. I can embrace it. I can get curious about it. I can explore it and see what information it has for me.

Now, I know that this can seem a little crazy to do this because it's so the opposite of what we've been taught. We've been taught to do what Frog does, put up all the barriers. But I will tell you, there is just such a truly seismic shift when you start doing this, when you start moving towards your craving, when you stop putting up the barrier. Because all of a sudden, you move out of this place of feeling powerless against it, and you move into a place of power.

Ep #422: What to Do When Temptation Strikes

If you guys are listening at home, if you have a copy of the Ultimate Guide to Drinking Less, you are going to be familiar with the technique that I'm about to talk about because it is the very first technique in the guide. It is a tool that I teach that really is the foundation of everything that you are doing when you're working with your Drink Archetypes. And this tool is called Name and Notice. And it's very, very simple, but it's also very deceptive in how powerful and truly transformational it is. Name and Notice. This tool is all about learning how to interrupt the habit so that you can bring your full awareness to what is happening.

So what I want you to do is think about what you normally do when a craving appears. So you might have that craving like, oh, I want to drink and you immediately go get yourself the drink. Or you might start justifying whether or not you should give in. It's like, oh, you know, but like it's been such a crappy day, right? Or I've been so good all week. So you might start that justifying or negotiating with yourself, right? You might say like, okay, well, I know I said that I wasn't going to, but like I'll be really good. I'll only have one or the negotiation might be around what other people are going to do. Right? It's like, let's see, you know, when my husband gets home, like, let's see whether or not he suggests having wine with dinner. Or let's see what happens, you know, if I'm going to meet up with so and so tonight, you know, I'll decide then.

You might also, instead of justifying or negotiating, you might try to find a distraction. So you might be like, oh God, I don't want the craving here. So like, let me try to find something else to occupy my mind. Or you might just go right into the place of telling yourself no. No, I can't. I'm not allowed to. Right into that place of like shame and blame or the place of trying to remind yourself of like all the downsides, why you're not supposed to.

Now, what I want you to consider is that all of these responses, even though they, on the surface, they look vastly different, right? Giving in looks very different from scare tactics or different from justifying or distracting or negotiating. They look vastly different, but at this point, they're all part of the

Ep #422: What to Do When Temptation Strikes

habit cycle, and they're all contributing to the underlying problem because they are all reinforcing the belief that your cravings have power. And unless you put up barriers, you're just going to give in. And when you believe this, when you believe that your cravings have power, you will tell yourself, you will convince yourself that the only options you have are to either say yes, or to hide, or to start fighting, or to start shaming and blaming yourself.

But what I want you to consider with this Name and Notice tool is that there is another option. You can sit with a craving and observe it. Because a craving is simply the feeling that appears when your brain thinks about a reward. And they can feel powerful or intense, but cravings can't make you do anything. Your craving is powerless without your consent.

And I want you to hear me say this not from a place of shame and blame. So that's not like, okay, so then if you drank too much, like you gave your consent, so like, see, you're bad. This is not at all about shame and blame. This is just about being curious. If cravings are powerless without my consent, then the real question is, why am I consenting in the moment? And the Name and Notice tool will help you start to answer this question.

It's about learning how to just sit with what just happened. Your brain just called out for a reward. Can I name what just happened and notice that just for a second or two? Instead of immediately jumping into giving in or negotiating or trying to hide from it or trying to fight or trying to shame yourself or trying to scare yourself out of it. Can you simply voice what just happened and then watch what bubbles up?

Now, I will tell you, one of the first things that you have to learn how to do in order how to do this because it is very simple to just name what happened. Like, oh, you know, I'm having a craving or this is a craving or my lower brain is activated or my lower brain wants a reward, however you're going to say it.

The very first thing that you have to do is really identify that you are desiring a drink. And this can seem really obvious. But when I start working

Ep #422: What to Do When Temptation Strikes

with people, right? And when people start to practice this tool, they discover that it's not as straightforward as it seems because like I said, sometimes cravings are really loud. Sometimes it's just like really clear. Right? You might actually hear yourself saying like, oh my God, I need a drink right now.

But there's all these other times when the cravings are not so loud and they're not so clear. You might wander aimlessly into the kitchen and find yourself staring in front of an open fridge looking to see what you have on hand to drink. And it's like, how did I even get here? It feels almost like you were sleepwalking. You had almost no conscious awareness of what you were doing.

I give a bunch of examples in the Ultimate Guide to Drinking Less, but what I want you to consider is that when people start to use the Name and Notice tool, they start to see that they have all of these cravings that they weren't really aware about. What they were aware of were the ones that were really loud, really persistent, really made themselves known. But their desire was showing up in all these kind of subtle, more quiet moments that they just didn't even see was part of the habit.

And this is really important. Because if a big part of the habit is outside of your conscious awareness, then how are you ever going to change it? Right? We can't change the things that we can't see, which means that we have to bring what is hidden. We have to bring what right now is part of really much more of our unconscious, we have to bring it into view. We have to bring it into the light so that we can see it and understand it and then change it.

Now, you can have cravings before you start drinking. You can have cravings after you started. So you can have cravings for more. But what I want you to do, what you can start doing right now, practicing is just naming the craving that you have before you start drinking. Again, this can sound like, oh, this is a craving. I'm having a craving. I just had a craving. Oh, my lower brain is activated or, oh, I see my brain wants a reward.

Ep #422: What to Do When Temptation Strikes

When you do this, you can do it silently to yourself, you can say it out loud. There's no kind of magical right language to use. It's really about finding language that feels natural to you, but it's about naming what is happening inside of you in a very neutral, non-judgmental way.

Now, I will note this will feel weird at first. It truly will because this is not part of the habit cycle. This is not part of what we do right now. Right now, it's like, no, I have the craving and I give in. No, I have the craving and I immediately try to talk myself out of it, or I immediately start justifying or negotiating, or I immediately just say like, no, you're not allowed to. So it will feel very weird and awkward and unnatural at first because that's a sign that we are interrupting the habit by doing something different.

What I want you to know is because it feels weird and awkward and a little unnatural at first, a lot of people will want to skip this step. And they will argue that the reason why they're skipping this step is because it just feels like it's so trivial. Like, what is that really even going to do? I'm naming the craving. Okay, big whoop. But again, when you're naming a craving, you're interrupting the habit cycle. You're not immediately giving in.

You're not immediately negotiating with yourself. You're not immediately making yourself bad or wrong. You're not telling yourself, no, you don't have free will, you're not allowed when truly you do have free will. You're simply creating this really powerful moment of interruption to pause and observe what is happening.

And by doing this, you are creating the one thing that you need more than anything, which is not more willpower, it's not more barriers, it's more awareness. Awareness about, okay, if the craving has no power without my consent, why am I consenting even though there is a part of me that says this is not the relationship that I want to have. This is not how much I want to drink. This doesn't feel good right now. So why am I consenting?

This awareness, it will help you start to find the beliefs that lead to giving in and ultimately lead to drinking too much. This awareness is what you need

Ep #422: What to Do When Temptation Strikes

to really find the Drink Archetypes. You know, so often when I'm working with people, especially at first, they'll take the quiz, the Drink Archetype quiz, and they'll get their archetypes or they'll just even read about the archetypes and they'll be like, oh yeah, this one, this one. And it's like, yep, I know which ones are my archetypes. And then when they start doing this work and they start getting more awareness, they're like, oh my gosh, I didn't even know. I didn't even realize. I didn't even think that this archetype applied. That's what happens when you create this kind of awareness.

And I will say there's more to the Name and Notice tool. We've really only talked about the name part. We haven't gone deep into the noticing part. But what I want you to consider is that when you have good intentions, when you have this vision for how you want to show up later, but you haven't given yourself a plan. This is the plan. The plan is, are you willing to name the craving? The plan is not, I hope that I just don't want to drink later in the day, or I hope that I don't want to have more than what I'm planning for. Because if you're relying on hope, what you're actually hoping is, I hope that I won't encounter that craving. Do you see? You see what's underlying there? Is this dislike, this sense of the craving is what has power. And so I hope that it just doesn't appear. I hope that I don't have a craving for more.

And this is part of the problem. Not only is it not realistic, but it's not changing the underlying relationship that we have with cravings, which is feeling afraid of them. Because you might right now not connect with this idea that you are afraid of your cravings. But think for a second, consider for a second, whether or not you connect with the idea that you wish they weren't there at all. And then be curious about that. Be curious about why you wish, oh, I wish I just didn't have any desire. I wish I didn't have the desire for more. Why is it? What is part of that underlying relationship that you currently have that suggests, oh yeah, I really have this very antagonistic relationship with my cravings.

That is always going to be a problem. That is always going to put you in a place of powerlessness. When in fact you are not. You have so much more

Ep #422: What to Do When Temptation Strikes

power than you think. The more you practice name and notice, the more you interrupt the habit, the more you create pause, the more you begin to gather really all of this awareness that you didn't have before.

And you don't have to be perfect at this. So many times I work with people and they will say, oh my god, like I didn't even notice I was having the craving and then I just acted on it, and it wasn't until after the fact that I could see, oh, there was a craving there. But they're still creating awareness. It's not about we have to do this 100% perfectly. And I want you to consider what would happen if you just committed to naming your cravings for one week. So I'm not talking about committing to a week of not drinking. I'm not even talking about committing to a week of drinking less. I'm just talking about committing to if I have a craving, I stop and name it. That's it.

Now, a lot of times when I give people this kind of assignment, it's like, okay, but then what, Rachel? Well, here's the thing. You will have at least then make a conscious decision from that point instead of going on autopilot. The autopilot of giving in, of negotiating, of justifying, of hiding, of distracting, of shaming yourself. You will at least have interrupted all of that autopilot and created that pause. And then you're making a conscious decision. Now, you may decide later on that you don't like the decision that you made, but at least you will have made it consciously. At least it will not have happened to you or feel as if it just happened to you.

So that's all I'm suggesting. Just naming your cravings for one week, not even changing anything about your drinking. That would be so radically different. It would be such a radical shift. Naming what is happening, naming the process underway in your brain is incredibly, incredibly powerful because if you can name what is happening, a part of you is kind of standing back from it.

This is what they talk about when they talk about the observer part of your brain. Instead of just like, uh, everything's just happening to me. It's like, nope, I can watch, I can observe what is unfolding. That is an incredibly,

Ep #422: What to Do When Temptation Strikes

incredibly powerful part of you that you want to start to build and strengthen. If you do this for a week, you would have so much more information. You would discover so much more about why you are actually giving in and why you are going back for more. And that is the information that you need if you want to create lasting change.

All right guys, if you're interested in The Ultimate Guide to Drinking Less, you can always get a copy of it at RachelHart.com/guide. I will see you all again in my next episode.

Hey guys, you already know that drinking less has plenty of health benefits. But did you know that the work you do to change your relationship with alcohol will help you become more of the person you want to be in every part of your life?

Learning how to manage your brain and your cravings is an investment in your physical, emotional and personal wellbeing. And that's exactly what's waiting for you when you join my membership *Take a Break*.

Whether you want to drink less, drink rarely, or not at all, we'll help you figure out a relationship with alcohol that works for you. We'll show you why rules, drink plans, and Dry January so often fail, and give you the tools you need to feel in control and trust yourself.

So, head on over to RachelHart.com and sign up today, because changing the habit is so much easier when you stop trying to go it alone.