Ep #496: When drinking makes it easier to be around family



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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Are there people in your family who drive you to drink? You know who I'm talking about. Opening a bottle of wine just makes it easier to be around them. This is episode 496, and with the holidays right around the corner, I'm giving you a simple question that will help you navigate these moments, and it has nothing to do with being grateful or being the bigger person.

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.

So Thanksgiving is almost here in the United States, and we are headed into a time of year when there is so much pressure to feel grateful and happy and all of this togetherness when we're hanging out with our families. And that can be especially tough when being around certain family members feels really hard, when there are people who just drive you nuts or make it really difficult to enjoy yourself.

So I want to share something I see happen a lot with the Hourglass archetype. This is the archetype where the brain associates alcohol with either helping you pass the time or making certain situations or people more tolerable. And what I'm going to share with you today is how we learn to relate to the experience of dislike. So maybe you find certain family members boring, maybe you feel like you have nothing in common with them. Maybe they're really argumentative or unkind or they've just always gotten under your skin. With the Hourglass archetype, we're essentially asking the drink to help make these people more tolerable.

I will tell you, I remember coaching a woman and she told me how she could not stand her stepfather. And she tried to avoid being around him as much as possible during the year. So she rarely saw him except during the holidays. And because she couldn't stand being in the same room with him, she also ended up drinking way more than she planned during the

holidays. And she felt so trapped. She didn't particularly want to be around her stepfather, but she also didn't want to drink too much.

And so I'm going to give you a strategy that I gave here. And again, it has nothing to do with practicing gratitude or thinking about how lucky you are or being the bigger person. Sometimes when we are telling ourselves or reminding ourselves that we should be grateful or appreciative for all that we have, we forget something pretty basic. We forget that disliking things and disliking people is a normal part of what it means to be human. You are supposed to dislike things. You are not meant to enjoy everybody. You're not meant to enjoy every activity. You're not meant to love every tradition or enjoy every gathering that you attend. Disliking things is part of your humanness. It would be really weird if you liked absolutely everything. Your likes and your dislikes are part of what make you.

So we expect people to have preferences. We don't all like the same food or music or movies. But for some reason, when it comes to family and holidays, we start acting as if dislike is off the table, as if we're supposed to enjoy everything and everyone. Often the real problem here isn't that you are disliking someone. It's everything else that happens around the emotion of dislike.

So you start dreading the fact that you're not going to enjoy yourself. You're telling yourself ahead of time that you can't be around this person if you don't have something to drink. Maybe you're showing up already feeling annoyed, and then as soon as you interact with the person, you feel more annoyed, and then you feel annoyed that you're annoyed because you have this belief that you shouldn't be feeling this way right now.

But what if the real problem here is that you're not normalizing dislike? You're making this very normal and expected part of everyone's human experience, you're making it a problem. You're believing that something has gone wrong, and then what do we do? So often we default to trying to drink over it, trying to manufacture a different feeling. Maybe because you're

telling yourself you're supposed to be in the holiday spirit and judging yourself that you're not. Maybe because you start judging the other person and telling yourself that you can't enjoy yourself as long as they're around you.

But what if you expected and normalized dislike, not to make it go away, but just to stop treating it like something has gone wrong or like it's a problem that needs to be fixed? Because anytime you're telling yourself that you're not supposed to be feeling the way you are with whatever emotion that's coming up—maybe it's dislike, maybe it's something else, maybe it's anxiety, maybe it's discomfort—whenever you tell yourself this, it's easy to start feeling trapped. And guess what happens when you feel trapped? You look for an escape. And then there's the bottle of wine or there's the liquor cabinet.

In that moment, we have the idea that the drink is going to make the person more tolerable. It's going to make your time more enjoyable. It's going to compensate for you being around someone that you don't really want to be around or doing something that you don't really want to do. But what if we could just back up and tell ourselves, I don't need to like this situation? So you don't have to be the bigger person. You don't have to practice gratitude. What if you just simply allowed yourself the humanness of disliking something even during the holidays?

I know it sounds almost too simple, but I really want you to think about it. There is no human experience without dislike. So who's to say that it shouldn't appear on certain days just because they're designated holidays? Who's to say that it shouldn't appear around certain people just because they're family members? And when you try to escape how much you dislike someone by drinking, how much do you end up disliking yourself later on for drinking too much?

Now, I'm not advocating that you be a Grinch. I'm not saying that you should announce your feelings to everyone at the table or tell everyone

how much you dislike them. I'm just suggesting, what would happen if you normalized this experience? If you stopped treating your dislike as something that needs to be solved immediately? Because what's the alternative? We tell ourselves we're supposed to feel certain ways on certain days or around certain people. And then when we don't, we start looking for ways to manufacture the feeling that we think we're supposed to have. And we make it more likely that we drink too much and eat too much, because guess what? One glass of wine, one beer isn't going to make it so you stop disliking Aunt Sally.

And what if drinking over your dislike just leads to more dislike later on, more dislike of yourself? Disliking the fact that you drank too much or that you got drunk and you said things that you wish you hadn't. What if your inability to tolerate disliking someone is actually creating more dislike for you to deal with?

Again, I'm not saying that you shouldn't drink on Thanksgiving or any other holiday. And I'm not saying that every time you have a glass of wine or a beer or a cocktail around family members, you're trying to escape something. I'm just asking you to get curious about the ways in which you may be telling yourself that you should or shouldn't be feeling a certain way and then how that shows up in your drinking. How you then turn to alcohol to try to change how you feel.

So here's what I want you to try. The next time you notice yourself disliking something or someone, just pause for a moment. Maybe it's in the middle of a conversation, maybe while you're doing a certain activity, maybe it's a family obligation. Whatever it is, ask yourself, if I'm not meant to enjoy everything, why is it a problem right now that I don't like this? Because maybe the thing you need to change isn't how you feel about the person or the situation. Maybe it's your belief that you shouldn't feel this way in the first place.

That's it for today. I'll see you next week.

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