

Ep #168: When Will This Be Over?



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With Your Host

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You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 168.

Welcome to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart. If you're an alcoholic or an addict, this is not the show for you. But if you are someone who has a highly functioning life, doing very well, but just drinking a bit too much and wants to take a break, then welcome to the show. Let's get started.

Hello, hello everybody. We are talking about a question that I have been hearing from people over and over and over since this pandemic started. And so the question is, "How much longer?" That's what I hear from so many people. Things would be easier right now if I just knew how much longer this is going to last.

How much longer are we going to have to shelter in place, or schools going to be closed, or businesses going to be closed? And so, so many people are telling me what's so troubling for them is not having an end point. Not knowing when things will end.

And the reason why I wanted to do an episode on this is because when I hear that, it's always a sign to me that you are unknowingly trying to muscle your way through your negative emotions. You are using willpower unknowingly and it never works. And it's so important for you to be onto yourself.

Because here is the thing; we do know that this pandemic is going to end. All pandemics come to an end. So when I hear people say to me, "Well Rachel, how long is it going to last? Tell me when it's going to end. I just hate not knowing. I just wish that I knew." What I hear them really saying is how much longer do I have to grit my teeth? How much longer am I going to have to use willpower to get through these negative emotions every day?

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And the reason you want to know how much longer is because willpower is exhausting. I talk about this all the time on the podcast. It's exhausting when you use it with the desire to drink, and it's exhausting when you use it with the negative emotions you're feeling during a pandemic. It doesn't matter the situation. Willpower is exhausting.

So when I was preparing this episode, it had me thinking about a hike that I took a couple years ago with my husband, before we had our son. We were in Sun Valley, Idaho in the summer time. And it seems really trivial to compare a pandemic to a hike, or when you're really stuck in the habit of drinking to compare it to a hike, but I think it's really worthwhile to take a look at this because it didn't feel trivial for me in the moment.

And that's the important thing to know about your negative emotions. They feel negative regardless what is happening. We don't need to start trying to say, well, this one is more justified and this one is less justified. Listen, when you're feeling a negative emotion, you're feeling a negative emotion. It doesn't have to be justified because of what is happening.

So we were in Sun Valley, we set out for a hike, just the two of us. My husband loves to go hiking. He loves walking. If we said we'll never drive the car anywhere, we'll just walk everywhere, my husband would totally be game for that. So we set out for this hike and it was steeper and hotter and longer than I had anticipated.

And I was already adjusting to being at altitude, and we were taking these switchbacks up the mountain and I couldn't really see the top. I didn't really have my bearings. I couldn't get a sense for where I was or how much longer we had to go. And my husband is totally chill. He's a very chill guy.

And so he was like, "Yeah, I'm not sure how much longer we have. Maybe this long, maybe a little bit longer, I don't know." So he wasn't giving me clear answers. And I started freaking out. I really did. Now, it was beautiful.

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It was a beautiful summer day. If you've never been to Sun Valley, it's amazing.

We were in the mountains, there was a beautiful blue sky, we were surrounded by nature, but I was losing my mind on the inside, all because I kept thinking to myself, "Oh my god, how much longer is this going to last? I can't handle this. I'm so hot. I'm so sweaty." I was dressed very inappropriately for this hike, and I just wanted it to be over. And I don't know when it's going to be over.

I wasn't talking to my husband, I had my head down, I was kind of trudging up the mountain just thinking to myself the entire time, "Let this be over. Let this be over." I was trying to willpower my way through that mountain. And you know what? It made for a really terrible hike.

And I want you to know this; it does not matter if you're on a hike or a 30-day break from drinking, or you're in the middle of a pandemic. Maybe you're doing all three at once. I don't know. When you're caught in the mentality of needing to willpower your way through your negative emotions and just getting caught in this question, when is it going to be over and when will it end, you're going to feel terrible no matter what is going on.

That really is the point. Because you're telling yourselves, "I just need to make it through tonight or this weekend or this month." We're so used to fixating on end dates as a way to navigate how we feel because no one teaches us how to manage our mind or manage our emotions.

So all we know how to do is to look at a calendar or to look at our watch. And that is just not very sustainable and does not make for a very enjoyable time. Trust me. If you are willpowering your way through your emotions every day, you're going to end your day looking for some sort of relief.

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Then you're going to start tomorrow feeling a little bit worse. It's not going to be helping you. Now, a lot of people, why they get stuck, and why I personally have been stuck in this habit of using willpower myself is because they get pretty successful at it. I was pretty successful at using willpower.

But when you're thrown into a moment like this, when we're in the middle of a pandemic and we don't know when it is going to end, we know that it will, but we don't have the date, that's when a lot of people start going a little crazy. Because we've spent so much time practicing the thought, "I'm going to feel better on this date, or I'm going to feel better at this time," but we can't rely on those thoughts anymore.

Now, if you've been thinking that yourself, I don't want you to beat yourself up. I just want you to understand why this is happening. It's because you're used to grinning and bearing, maybe not so much grinning, just bearing your way through your negative emotions. But there really is another way.

That's what I teach. That's what the think-feel-act cycle is really at its heart about, learning that you can experience your emotions in another way. You don't have to resist them and push them away and eat over them and drink over them and distract yourself. You can actually allow that negative emotion to be there and recognize and realize that it's harmless.

And then what happens is that you open yourselves up to so much more positive emotion in the process. And that might feel like a stretch for some of you, to think about how there is positive emotion right now, but there is positive emotion to you available right now.

There are moments of beauty and moments of connection and moments of joy that are happening right now that you will miss, you will lose out on if you're constantly looking at a calendar or looking at your watch and thinking, "When will this be over?" Willpower robs you of those moments.

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And the reason why that happens is because when you are used to gritting your teeth, you're not in the present moment. Your brain is off thinking about a future when it will all be over, because you're basically saying I'm willing to suffer right now so that I can feel better at some end date. But we know this doesn't work to change the habit.

In fact, this is something that I constantly caution people about in the Take A Break program. I'm like a broken record when it comes to this. It is why the work in there focuses on urges and allowing urges and learning how to manage your mind, rather than crossing days off a calendar.

Because when you focus on crossing days off a calendar, I promise, you're in trouble. And it doesn't matter if you cross off 30 or 60 or 90 or 180 or an entire year. If all you're doing is crossing off days, you're going to end up right where you started. You're going to pick up right where the habit left off, only because what you taught yourself was that yes, you didn't need the drink, but you didn't teach your mind how to actually change the structures that were fueling the habit.

You didn't teach your mind how to cope with the emotions and cope with the thoughts differently. You were just pushing them away. And this is what I'm worried about people doing with the pandemic. Because they're not used to managing their mind. We have a lot of practice as a society of just pushing through things and muscling through things.

But when you really think about okay, so how do I want to show up on the other side of this moment in history, what do I want to do, how do I want to look back and say, "Remember when that happened? This is how I came through it," what is that answer?

I'm sure for all of you listening that you're thinking, "Well of course I want to come out stronger, but how do I do that? I don't want to go backwards. I don't want to go deeper into habits of numbing. I don't want to use this

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time, this pandemic as an excuse to go face first into eating and drinking and numbing, but how do I do that?”

I’m going to tell you. The way to come out stronger is to use this time to learn how to make peace with what you are feeling on a day-to-day basis and not just be focused on some end date, to not just be focused on the willpower and the resisting and the gritting and the pushing through.

Because willpower just isn’t a long-term solution for how you are feeling. Because it never gets to the root cause. We are going to get to the other side of this pandemic, but I promise you this; there will be something else unexpected in the future. And you will attempt to use the same tactic of muscling your way through and counting down days unless you show up differently right now, and you can do that.

I don’t know if you know how powerful you are, but you are. You have the power to change your thoughts. You have the power to examine how your brain is automatically interpreting everything around it. And look and see how that’s making you feel and how you show up when you feel that way and decide what you want to think on purpose.

Because when it comes to drinking, willpower is simply the ability to just say no. And it can work for a period of time, but it won’t actually teach you how to change those thoughts that had you wanting to say yes, had you looking for the drink in the first place. So that underlying desire doesn’t actually change because you haven’t gotten to the root cause of it, which of course is your thinking.

But the same is true when it comes to your negative emotions. So when it comes to your desire, willpower is your ability to resist and say no to your desire, but when it comes to your negative emotions, willpower is your ability to resist how you are feeling and push it away and not acknowledge it, and try to eat and drink and distract yourself over it.

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And again, this can work for a period of time, but you know this to be true, that negative emotions that aren't dealt with, they will eventually come out. And if you're not dealing with them, they're going to come out sideways. I know this, not only because I see it with so many of the women that I work with, but because I saw it so clearly in my own life.

People will always say to me, "You talk about taking breaks from drinking at several different points during your 20s, so what made it different finally? What finally changed?" And the answer was I let go of using willpower. When I stopped drinking for the first time shortly after I turned 22, I stopped drinking for a year, but it was a long, drawn out, miserable battle with willpower.

And it took all of my energy to say no. And I turned down so many drinks at parties and I avoided cocktails and I avoided happy hour and I would isolate and I would decline wine with dinner and I said no to champagne toasts at New Year. But I was white-knuckling my entire way through and it wore on me.

Because I wasn't actually doing anything to change my desire. I still really wanted to drink. I still really wanted to be what I thought was normal. And saying no over and over again and gritting my teeth and isolating myself didn't make me feel normal. It made me feel exhausted, and that's why I kept flip-flopping.

But when I took a break from drinking almost 10 years later in my 30s, and that time I committed to finally doing it differently, to not just saying no, not hiding out, not isolating, but to actually understand how this habit was working, to actually learn how to teach myself to give me all the things that I thought I needed a drink, whether that was confidence or ease or spontaneity, to teach myself how to actually provide that to myself, when I did it that way, that's when things really changed.

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Because I was committed not to saying no at the expense of everything else, I was committed to understanding how I was the creator of my desire and how to change it. And how the think-feel-act cycle worked and how to change that. That's what made it different and that's what I teach you guys.

You don't need to resist your desire if you know that you're the one creating it with your mind. When you see it as just a sentence in your mind, you see that it's harmless. And the same is true of how you're feeling right now. Whether it's stress or overwhelm or frustration or anger or grief, when you see how your brain is creating it, when you see the sentence creating it, you realize, I don't need to resist it. I can allow it to be there.

It doesn't mean that I shouldn't be feeling it. Doesn't mean that it's a problem that I'm thinking a sentence that's creating it. It just means that I have the power to observe it and open up to it and decide if I can start to wiggle it or shift it or change it. That is the power of dropping willpower.

Willpower won't ever let you do that because you're so busy tensing up and squeezing your eyes shut and clenching your fists together. That's all you're focused on. When my willpower failed many times throughout my 20s, I always gave in to my desire to drink because I hadn't ever changed my desire.

And I always saw it as a sign that I just wasn't trying hard enough, that if only I tried harder, that if only I was more disciplined, if only I had more resolve, then I'd be able to change the habit, but that's the lie. And that's part of the lie that's happening for you right now, that if only you knew what the end point was, that you'd feel better right now. You'd feel better right now if you were thinking better thoughts.

And if you're not, it's not because there's any reason to blame you. It's just because your primitive brain, your lower brain is running the show right now. There's a lot of fear, there's a lot of anxiety out in the world. Your primitive brain is onto that. And it wants to run away with it. Now is really

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the time for you to learn how to engage your higher brain and your prefrontal cortex so that you're not at the mercy of that.

And I have to tell you guys, I am doing this every single day. I am practicing managing my mind around this pandemic every single day. But I have the benefit of having done this for so many years and practiced the think-feel-act cycle and observing my thoughts and practicing new ones. I have the benefit of knowing that I have the authority, I have the ability to always question and change how I'm thinking, even when it feels impossible, even when my brain wants me to believe this is the only way to think about this situation.

That really is the key for you. What is your brain thinking about right now on a day-to-day basis? Are you willing to pay attention to that? Are you willing to open yourself up to that? Are you willing to write it out, put it in the think-feel-act cycle, see what it's creating for you, but also say, is there another way that I could look at this situation? Is there something else that I could think? Is there another question that I could be asking myself other than, "When is this going to end?"

Maybe the question is how am I going to use this time for me? How am I going to use this time to come through stronger? That's possible for you as well. Ask yourself, how am I feeling right now? I just think that that question can be such a powerful guide.

We're so used to answering that question, how are you feeling? How are you doing? Fine, fine. That's how we answer it just regularly in life. We're not used to really connecting with our emotions. And now, how are you feeling becomes terrible, horrible, miserable. But can you really use that question as a way to find the emotion so that you can locate the thought? So that you can start to let go of the willpower, the muscling through, the clenching that you're holding onto?

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What is the emotion right now that you don't want to feel, that you don't want to be present with? And why are you trying to run from it? Why don't you want it to be there? I'll tell you this; in my own work, the emotion that I have found that I still have to make room and space for is grief. It is.

It's grief. Even though nothing has happened to any of my family members, any of my loved ones. Grief is the emotion that I still find my body wanting to resist and hunker down against and just go into willpower and go into muscling through. But if I can just allow it to be there and let it be okay that I'm here feeling grief sometimes and observe why that is and notice what my thinking is, because a lot of my thoughts, especially around grief for me right now are very connected to what I regard as my hometown.

I lived 13 years in New York City. I still don't really feel like San Francisco is my home. And if I just open myself up to it, all of a sudden, it just loses some of its grip. I get to take authority over it. And I don't have to then immediately just snap my fingers and become happy. I don't even think that's realistic.

But I can start to look at the thoughts that my brain is coming up with and see, can I start to be with this mind of mine in a different way? You don't need to run from how you're feeling. You can allow it. You don't need to run from your desire. You can allow it.

And that can make your present moment, your current experience more peaceful, rather than asking that question over and over, when is this going to end? Or telling yourself, I'd feel better if I just knew when it was all going to be over, or what next week or next month or this summer was going to look like.

This pandemic will end. We are going to come through on the other side. Telling yourself you need to know the date and that it would be better if you did isn't going to help make the process any more manageable for you. In fact, it's going to make the process more painful for you.

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The same is true when you're trying to change the habit of drinking. The same is true when you're trying to learn a new way to cope with your negative emotions. That is why the work that all of you are doing when you tune into this podcast is so powerful.

Because yes, we're talking about alcohol and your relationship to it and the habit of drinking, but you're learning a skill that you can apply to everything in your life, including moments like this. So know this; you're so much stronger than you think. You are so much more capable of dealing with whatever you are feeling, whether it is desire or stress or fear or grief or anxiety. You are so much more capable than you think.

You don't need to muscle your way through. You don't need to look at a calendar or look at a clock or have a crystal ball to feel better right now. All you need to do is simply look at your mind. Alright, you got this. That's it for today, my friends. I will talk to you next week.

Hey, if you're a woman who enjoys this podcast and wants to have me as your coach, you have to join the *Take A Break* program. It's a 30-day break from drinking that will teach you how to say no to your urges without deprivation, the secret to not needing a drink in any situation, including not needing a drink to take the edge off, and never again feeling like you can't trust yourself around alcohol. Join me over at RachelHart.com/join.

Together, we're going to blow your mind.