

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Gretchen Rubin

JVN: Happy New Year and Welcome to Getting Curious. I'm Jonathan Van Ness, and every week I sit down for a gorgeous conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. Another year, another us, I can't believe that it's our first episode of Getting Curious in 2024. I am that person who says "Happy New Year" through the duration of January. I can't help it, but I have been thinking a lot about New Year's resolutions and happiness more broadly. 2023 was a very stressful year for me personally and globally. There has been so much collective suffering out there, and so I'm curious, is happiness selfish? How can we be more happy? And that's why we're talking to no one better than Gretchen Rubin. Gretchen Rubin is the author of the best selling book, *The Happiness Project*, and host of the podcast "Happier" with Gretchen Rubin. She decided to become a writer after clerking for Sandra Day O'Connor. She's been interviewed by Oprah. She's been an answer on Jeopardy. She's walked arm in arm with the Dalai Lama and she is our guest for our first episode of the New Year. Gretchen. How are you?

GRETCHEN RUBIN: I am so happy to be talking to you. Thank you for having me, and we're talking about one of my favorite things, like getting started in January. It's such a great topic.

JVN: What is happiness?

GRETCHEN RUBIN: Well, as you mentioned, I started my career in law and I have memories of spending an entire semester in law school arguing about the definition of contract and something like happiness is an even more difficult concept to define. There's something like 15 academic definitions of happiness. But I think for people like you and me, the average person, it's more helpful to think about, you know, maybe it's joy or bliss or contentment or satisfaction or well being, but whatever it is for us individually, it's, it's more helpful I think to think about, well, whatever it is, I think it means to be happier this week, next month, next year. What can I do to be happier? However, I see it rather than thinking like, well, what is this mysterious happiness? Can I get there. What does that look like? To me that's very confusing. But does something make me happier? That feels a lot more, um, understandable.

JVN: So it's more about like a feeling in the present then like a long term goal or-

GRETCHEN RUBIN: It's more about moving in the right direction than wondering if you're, you're, you've actually gotten there, you know, because are you happy? It's like whenever I'm like, what does that even mean? You can be happy and unhappy at the same time, you can be unhappy in some ways happy in others. It can get very confusing. But when you're like, could I be, is this making me happier? Is my gardening making me happier? Then you're like, yes, my gardening is making me happier. And whereas you're like, does, am I happy about gardening? It's like, well, but I'm also frustrated and you know, it, I think that gets confusing words, thinking about moving in the right direction, feels clearer.

JVN: How can we be happy when we know that so many people are suffering? And is it selfish? That's really what I've been thinking about a lot. And

GRETCHEN RUBIN: I'm, well, I think that is the profound question and, and the central question which is in a world full of suffering and injustice, is it morally appropriate for an individual to think about their individual happiness? And often you might even even making it AAA more difficult question is to think like, well, really, I have all the basics of a happy life. So, if I'm worried about my own happiness or thinking about my own happiness, does that just mean I'm a spoiled brat. Um, but what research shows, and I think if you think about the people in your own life, your own experience, you see that happy people are more interested in the problems of the people around them and they're more interested in the problems of the world. Happier people are more likely to vote, they're more likely to give away their money. They're more likely to- to volunteer. They're more likely to help out if a family member or friend or a neighbor or a colleague needs a hand. They're better leaders and better team members. They are more patient, they have a better sense of humor, they have better habits. So, you know, like you talked about TV, and, and just all the anxiety of what's happening in the world. When we're happier, we have the emotional wherewithal to turn outward and to think about the pain of the world and the pain of other people. But when we're unhappy, it's really easy to turn inward and become defensive and isolated and preoccupied with own problems because we're not happy. So we can't even face thinking about the news because we're just so we just have to manage ourselves. And so being happier actually allows us to turn outward. So sometimes people think like, "well happy people, they just want to sit by a pool and drink margaritas all day," but actually happier people start to think about things like maybe we need to work on making voting more accessible, you know, and get and what can I do about that? So I think, you know, if it, if it does feel selfish to be happier, we should be selfish if only for selfless reasons because it really does give us the wherewithal to engage with the world and the pain of the world.

JVN: Where would you start to become happier in 2024?

GRETCHEN RUBIN: Oh, interesting question. OK. So I would say you could think about that in two ways. So one way is to say, well, the secret to happiness is relationships. Ancient philosophers and contemporary scientists agree that to be happy, we have to have strong relationships. So, anything that you would do in '24 which would either deepen your relationships or broaden your relationships is likely to make you happier if you start a book group or join, join a gardening club or plan a reunion with your best friends from growing up or whatever it might be. Um That's likely to make you happier. But I think you could also say that what is the most important thing to do is to think about is to know yourself and to think about, well, what kind of person am I? What are my values? What are my temptations? What are my interests that I'm not pursuing and really think about yourself and it seems like it'd be so easy to know ourselves- we just hang out with ourselves all day long. But in fact, this is, it's a huge, it's a huge challenge to know ourselves. So you, you might have to think like, well, what do I even want? Who am I anyway? Start there! Which I think is very hard.

JVN: What are strategies that we can use to stay in that like, loving journey place and not that like, oh, the journey isn't working the way I thought it was going to work place.

GRETCHEN RUBIN: Well, that's a really tough one. I mean, I think one of the things that's easy to overlook, but which is really important is just to think about your body because your physical experience always is going to color your emotional experience or your mental

experience. So it's really easy to be like, oh, I'm gonna stay up late binge watching my favorite show. I don't need that. I don't need that sleep. I can get by on five hours and not realize like, wow, you're really chronically under slept and that is just draining you or I'm, I'm not getting exercise the way that I usually do. And so I'm starting to feel kind of sluggish and, and uh low energy. Um, but if I got more exercise and more movement, got outside and got some sunshine in my face to like reset my circadian rhythm that would help me. Because sometimes we think it's like we're responding to the world and we are responding to the world. But when we take care of our own bodies, it, it's, it helps us to have the energy that we need to turn outward. I mean, one thing, um, for some people, it's very helpful to say, well, treat yourself like a toddler. You don't let your toddler get too hungry or cold or overwhelmed or, you know, you make sure that they have like plenty of time to rest and they, you know, they nothing, you're not exposing them to things that are just going to overwhelm them, um, or treat yourself like a puppy. Some people are so hard on themselves, it's like, would you treat a puppy that way? A puppy needs good food and exercise and fun and companionship and care. And so sometimes you have to treat yourself like something else, um, in order to take care of yourself because really, it's, it's these basics that then will allow us to turn to these more transcendent and really often more challenging things that we're asking of ourselves.

JVN: You're a literal happiness expert who studies this. So, should we even make New Year's resolutions? And do they work?

GRETCHEN RUBIN: Well, here's the thing about New Year's resolutions. We're always more likely to, to achieve an aim if we identify it, you know, you're going to hit a target if you aim at it. And so I think it's really helpful to make resolutions, um just put, to articulate what it is that we want to do for ourselves. But a lot of people don't like resolutions. Like they have bad associations with resolutions because they've made them in the past and they fail to keep them or they feel like a New Year's resolution is arbitrary or they don't like feeling chained to a behavior. So they don't like the idea of a resolution. So there's a lot of ways you can make resolutions that are, that are, you know, give you a more fun framework for potentially or a new fresh framework for picking, for trying to stick to a New Year's resolution. But I do think that for most people, it's really helpful just because, you know, in the, in the busyness of everyday life, we don't often step back and think like, "well, what would make me happier?" You know, you just, you're just so busy going about your day to day. You know, we don't, we don't ask ourselves that question. And so I, I do think that it and, and, and, and January 1st for a lot of people feels like a, like a, an auspicious day, feels like a, a fresh start, a clean slate. And so if it feels like that for you, it's, it's good to take advantage of that.

JVN: Why do so many people break resolutions? Is it about like changing, like reframing our, our relationship with the resolution if you fall short, like-

GRETCHEN RUBIN: I think that the reason that a lot of people fail to keep their resolutions is they set them up in the wrong way for themselves. So I think it's very easy to think. Like if something works for Jonathan, it should work for me or if something works for me, it should work for Jonathan and, and assuming that there's a right way or a best way and that if it's not working for me, there's something wrong with me or I'm lazy or I can't keep my

promises to myself. Um Instead of saying like, oh OK, this doesn't work for me. It works for other people, but it doesn't work for me. How can I set it up in a different way? And, and because there's many ways to achieve our aims and sometimes, and it, and it's very clear that some things work really well for some people that don't work for other people. But I think a lot of times people assume that every, a tool should fit every hand, but no tool fits every hand. So you've got to figure out what works for you.

JVN: Um obsessed with that. Here's another thing I'm obsessed with, with your work, Gretchen. You've created this framework of four personality tendencies, excuse my French. But I fucking love like personality like graph charts, this thing. Oh God, it makes me feel so complete and stuff.

GRETCHEN RUBIN: Exactly.

JVN: So you've created this framework of four personality tendencies that help us understand our approach and how to achieve our goals. Like break down what are the four categories and also ahead of time and maybe this will come in part in your explanation, but I already have a follow up. Um Like, can it, can it be like a combo like or is it, are you like mostly one or the other? Like, what's your, what's the whole situation?

GRETCHEN RUBIN: So this is a personality uh framework that I figured out when I was studying habits because I noticed that like, sometimes people could really easily form habits and sometimes not and why. So um I'm gonna explain them and, and then Jonathan, we're gonna figure out what your tendency is because I'm dying to know I have a theory, but I wanna see if I'm right. Um And most people, I will just briefly describe them and you'll know what you are, you'll know what the people around you are. We can do game of Thrones, characters, the game of Thrones very clearly. You see the four tendencies all over Game of Thrones. Um Yeah, and, but if people want to take a quiz, like, you know, actually have the fun of taking a quiz and like getting a little report, they can go to gretchenrubin.com/quiz and take it there for free. Like 3 million people have taken this quiz, but I'll just explain the framework right now and, and that's probably enough. Ok. So this looks at something that sounds very boring, but is actually really, really juicy, which is how you respond to expectations. So we all face two kinds of expectations, outer expectations, like a work deadline and inner expectations. Like my own desire to keep a New Year's resolution. So depending on whether you meet or resist an outer and an inner expectation, that's what makes you an upholder, a questioner, an obliger or a rebel.

So upholders readily meet outer and inner expectations. So they meet the, the work deadline. They keep the New Year's resolution without much fuss. They want to know what other people expect from them. But their expectations for themselves are just as important. They tend to love calendars and to do lists and execution they don't need a lot of supervision. These are people, their motto is "discipline is my freedom." Then there are questioners, questioners, question all expectations. They'll do it if they think it makes sense. So they resist anything arbitrary, ineffective, unjustified. They don't like January 1st. They think January 1st is an arbitrary date. They need to know "why" - they tend to love to customize, they tend to love research. So if something makes sense to them, they'll do it. No problem. But if it doesn't make sense to them, they'll push back. So their motto is "I'll

comply. If you convince me why." Then there are obligers. This is the biggest tendency for everyone. Uh And obliger readily meet outer expectations, but they struggle to meet inner expectations. So these are people who say, why can I keep my promises to other people? But I can't keep my promises to myself. Um They are the rock of the world. They are the ones who are most likely to help out when someone needs a hand, they pair up the most easily with the other three tendencies. Um Really for them, it's, they are the ones that have the frustration of like why is it that I can do everything I say, I'm to do for other people, but I struggle for myself. So the answer for them is outer accountability. They have to have outer accountability even to meet an inner expectation. Like if you want to read more, join a book group. If you want to exercise, work out with a trainer, work out with a friend who's annoyed if you don't show up, take your dog for a run who's so disappointed if he doesn't get to go for a run, whatever, you just need that outer accountability. If you're gonna keep a resolution, you need that outer accountability. So their motto is you can count on me and I'm counting on you to count on me. And then, the final group and the smallest group is rebel and rebels resist all expectations, outer and inner alike. They want to do what they want to do in their own way in their own time, they could do anything they want to do. But if you ask or tell them to do something, they're very likely to resist. And typically they don't tell themselves what to do. Like they don't sign up for a 10 a.m. spin class on Saturday because they think, I don't know what I want to do on Saturday and just the idea that someone's expecting me to show up is gonna annoy me. Um So their motto is "you can't make me and neither can I"

JVN: Ok, I think I know what I am but um is there like, can we do in real time? Yes. And then we'll find out about me?

GRETCHEN RUBIN: So let me ask you these questions and I'll try to do a speed diagnosis. Ok. Um How do you personally feel about New Year's resolutions? Not what you think generally, but in your own life, how do you personally think about them New Year's resolutions?

JVN: I like them. But I also think that like we can decide like we can create a date that's like our time for change. Like at any time of the year, like I started breathing free from cigarettes on like January 21st of like 2008- or something. Yeah, 2008 I think or maybe seven when I was like 20. It was like right before my 21st birthday. So yeah, like I, yeah, I like them but I think you can do them at any time of the year.

GRETCHEN RUBIN: Ok. Second question, let's say you and I are in a coffee shop and we're in the back room and it's, it's in the middle, middle of the morning and there's nobody really around and, and like the, the server is out of sight and there's a sign on the wall that says no cell phone use and I pull out my cell phone and start using it. How does that make you feel?

JVN: I don't care.

GRETCHEN RUBIN: Why don't you care?

JVN: Um Probably because I would be taking my cell phone out too to like, see if someone texted me or like, if the light was really cute, then maybe I'm like, like, maybe let's like, maybe we'll do like a little selfie if there's no one else around because, you know, I don't

like to be on camera. If, if it says no, no cell phone use, I get it. But if there's no one else around and they're not going to be in the shot, there's like a really cute background or something and you wouldn't get kicked out of the coffee shop because, you know, you couldn't really tell, like, if you posted it or something. I just think I'd probably be like, oh my God, let's both take out our phones.

GRETCHEN RUBIN: Ok. I think, I know, I think I know what you are and it's what I thought going in. Um So, uh, so that's, that's interesting. But I want to ask you a third question, which is, let's say there was something that you were doing in your own life that was really important to you. You were really sticking to it and it was really important to you. But somebody else was kind of like, you know, that's kind of inconvenient for me that you're doing whatever you, you, you've added this to your day or your schedule or whatever. How would you feel about that?

JVN: None. But I may feel I may feel like, you know, I may feel a little bad or like, wish that they didn't feel that way. But if I was really committed to it and I knew that it was something I really needed to, that was really important to me. I'm going to do it.

GRETCHEN RUBIN: I think you're a questioner, Jonathan and that's what I thought going in from reading your memoir and listening to you talk, I thought you were probably a questioner. Does that ring true for you? Do you feel like-

JVN: Yeah, when you were describing them, I was like, I got a smile on my face and you were just because I was like, yeah, it's like I'll do it. But I need to understand why I'm excited for us to learn more about other people because sometimes people are just pissing me off. Like sometimes whether, you know, we all just got done with the holidays. I don't know about you. But there was some family time for me. So, like, you know, our families have a diversity of opinions and usually not the diversity that I know that I want to hear. And I'm sure that people on the other end, like, don't have their- it happens all the way I want to learn-

GRETCHEN RUBIN: But here's, but here's the thing about why the tendencies can help with those like difficult family situations. For instance, like even beyond kind of forming habits or keeping resolutions is like- Let's say you're dealing with a family member who's a rebel, like rebels. Like if you say, well, you have to be you, like, you have to believe this, right? They'll be like, I don't have to do anything and they'll just resist, you know. And so if you'll understand, like this person is just coming at the world, like not wanting to be controlled, not wanting to be told what to do, not being told what to think. I might be actually accelerating that behavior by coming at them. Like sometimes we don't understand how people are responding to us, you know, and I feel and, and now that I understand the rubble, I'm an upholder. So I'm like the opposite of a rebel now that I under, I understand like how exasperated they are, how they feel like other people are trying to control them all the time. Whereas-

JVN: if you're got to understand this, I understand this. Gretchen. Ok, let's go back to the Game of Thrones analogies because then I'm going to be able to understand like who the people in my family are, who shall remain nameless and, and people can apply it for their own too. Ok. Ok. Ok. Ok. So who, who's like the upholder in Game of Thrones world?

GRETCHEN RUBIN: We're gonna go deep Game of Thrones, because I know you can throw it down. Um, ok. Upholders, beautiful upholders in Game of Thrones like Brienne of Tarth, right? She's absolutely, she keeps her vows, she's unwavering. She just has this very, very high level of keeping her word. And then you see the darker view of it with Stannis Baratheon, right? Because he's supposed to be king. So he's gonna be king. Um his the onion night, saved everybody but he's, but the Stannis is still gonna chop off his fingers because if you commit a crime, you're gonna get punished no matter what. Um And then Tyrion who is, you know, constantly marching around telling everybody what to do. He's always saying like, why can't anybody else in this family just like get with the program and do what I tell them to do. He has this just sort of unfailing discipline. So that's upholders like you see the and all these, all these tendencies have like they're positive and they're negative and so it's not that anyone is better than the other. And I think one of the things I like about game of Thrones is, it shows you sort of the good and the bad. For instance, if you think about rebels, so rebels resist outer and inner expectations. Like one rebel is Cersei who she'll burn you down. She'll, you know, she'll do anything.

JVN: She is gonna, she's fears, fuck her twin brother no matter what. She doesn't give a fuck about what you think!

GRETCHEN RUBIN: Like you're all her enemies, she's, you know, she's just going to do it.

JVN: Can I just say Gretchen Sidebar? I found her into her story so frustrating. I thought she got out too easy. I wanted something I felt like I wanted and I love Lena in real life. So I love you. And I'm glad that you didn't have to film something that was that annoying. But your character I feel like got off easy. I just-

GRETCHEN RUBIN: No, there's that scene where Sansa says um I wanted to kill Cersei but your your dragon queen got there first and you're like, yeah, Sansa should have been able, it should have been like a little finger moment where Sansa got to like get her vindication. But here's the thing, Cersei is a rebel, but Arya is also a rebel, right? And Taiwan even says to Arya, you remind me of my daughter. They are both rebels. So Ari is the free one all making all her choices like moving through the world. And Cersei is also a rebel. So you see kind of the positive and the negative. The biggest questioner, your tendency, Jonathan is Tyrion. He's the one that's going around saying why do we have these forms of government? Why can't we do a better thing? Like, why can't we like, why can't things just make sense? He's the only one who really is articulating the desire to system radically make things better or maybe was too. You don't really know about V but

JVN: But who is High Garden Maggie Smith, who is-

GRETCHEN RUBIN: I can't tell with Elena, there's not enough information and I love the character of Elena and Marjorie. I can't tell with them because you have to know how people think. But the obliger the thing, OK. Obliger is the biggest tendency in the world and who are the obliger on Game of Thrones, Jon Snow, Daenerys, Targaryen, Jamie Snow. They're all obliger. And here's the thing if a rebel pairs up in romance or at work like a pair that works together. If one is a rebel, the other one is, is usually an obliger. That's by far the most dominant pattern. Cersei is a rebel and Jamie is an obliger.

JVN: OK? I don't want us to get in a fight because we made it so far through. But I feel like if Jon Snow was such a fucking obliger, he wouldn't have screwed over Christina Aguilera like that. I still cannot get over like those other people could diddle each other even though they were brother and sister. I just, how could Jon Snow do that.

GRETCHEN RUBIN: But Tyrion said like, you're the only one who can do it. You have to do it to save the realm. It was a totally obliging

JVN: but they know he was in the person. Why didn't John? All I wanted, all I wanted was for them to end up together. And I can't believe that they didn't. And I don't care if they were half brother and half sister, they were happy. Like Christina Aguilera was finally happy and after everything she went through, weren't you a little sad for her? I was like sad for Daenerys.

GRETCHEN RUBIN: Yeah. But you know, she saw it coming. I mean, that was you, do you think so? Well, that scene where she comes out on the stairs and the dragon wings open behind her and you're like, oh my gosh, she's gonna stop at nothing. She's the, she has all the weapons in the world and she's convinced that she's right.

JVN: She was, I was rooting for her and I'm still not over it. Gretchen in 2024. I'm still not over it.

GRETCHEN RUBIN: That's why it's a good show because there's all the, you're like, I don't know, I don't know.

JVN: Were you just like super happy with the ending? You were just like, I like Jon Snow or you were just like no notes. You had no notes.

GRETCHEN RUBIN: I had notes. But I, I did see the- I felt that coming. That's that's that ending for her did not come as a shock to me. I felt like I felt like things were going in that direction.

JVN: But didn't you still feel like she was screwed?

GRETCHEN RUBIN: I mean, she burned down an entire city of innocent people when she was given the chance to-

JVN: Because he rejected her like she was so sad. Isn't that why she did it? Because Jon Snow was like, I don't want you no more because we're half brother and half sister and then she was like-

GRETCHEN RUBIN: No, but I don't think that's why he rejected her. I think he was scared of her. I think he was scared of her. I don't think he rejected her.

JVN: A strong women.

GRETCHEN RUBIN: I think he was scared of her because he felt like she was, drunk with power.

JVN: Oh, yeah, that's what

GRETCHEN RUBIN: it was. That's what I thought. I don't think it was anything about the relationship and I think he, I think if he thought he could just be her king and let her be the queen and she would

JVN: be benevolent or whatever.

GRETCHEN RUBIN: But it just felt like, um, she got more and more like no one could disagree with her and she, I don't know, I mean, you know, a lot of the people close to her that were tempering. Yeah, that's

JVN: true. I just loved her. I was like, so team her the whole time. I don't, I just was.

GRETCHEN RUBIN: remember how she burned Varus. And he was, to me, he seemed

JVN: Which one was Varus again?

GRETCHEN RUBIN: He was, he was the spy. He was the spider. He was the one that thought that he was trying to poison her.

JVN: Did I call him Dr. Evil? Is that the one? The bald one who I called doctor Evil? He was so evil. I

GRETCHEN RUBIN: thought he was trying to do.

JVN: No, no, no, no, no, no. Which one was? I got to Google Barris. What did I call him?

GRETCHEN RUBIN: The bald one? The spy, the one that was always, I

JVN: I never trusted him. I never, no, I never trusted him. Lord Barris. Oh no, no, no, I OK. But honestly now I'm realizing maybe I never understood what was going on because I was so busy thinking about nicknames. But no, I thought I thought he was trying to screw over Christina Aguilera.

GRETCHEN RUBIN: He was, he was trying to poison her. That is true.

JVN: Yes. Yes. I wasn't into him because I like Christina Aguilera. You were team

GRETCHEN RUBIN: Daenerys all the way.

JVN: I was. And I was from the second I laid eyes on her. I think it was the bleach and tone. I just, I know I was just saying I'm pretty, you guys are going to see on Pretty Curious that I was not necessarily, but it was a wig and I just feel like she did everything right. And I just, I loved Christina Aguilera. I love the dragons. I loved her resurrection story. I loved and she took those fuckers out in that fucking hay fire and she was like jokes on you fuckers.

GRETCHEN RUBIN: That was an amazing scene.

JVN: Yeah. Like I just loved her and I also love the stars. Like I loved her and I love the stars and I just really like, and I also, I don't, I don't know.

GRETCHEN RUBIN: You wanted, you wanted a happy ending for kind of the fire and ice of it. You wanted Jon Snow and Daenerys to find a way to rule.

JVN: Yeah, I wanted a joint coalition. Yes, I'm non-binary. So it's very like me, you know, like we're very much like we just want to embrace. Yes, like, come on, let's just, let's see all of

our parts. OK. We did an episode on Getting Curious last year about like this like fear scientist who was studying like women of the Far, right on social media, and ever since we did that episode, I've been talking about it so much on the podcast. My TikTok and my Instagram is like, inundated with all these like, hard, right conservative. And also like, I think because I was so shocked by a lot of the like, judgment and like content that was there. I can't stop watching it because it's like, so now like my algorithm keeps showing me more stuff like that. And you know, there's one part of myself that wants to change hearts and minds. But then there's another part that just doesn't really want, like, like, you know, there's like, it's like a lot of my parts are like, in opposition with each other.

GRETCHEN RUBIN: Yes. Well, and this is social media, like as human beings, we've never faced this before. You could never like encounter this kind of immediate, like rapid fire, like consequences and in response, it's like we are just not, this is a fire hose that we just have not evolved to handle. So everybody is just sort of trying to figure out like, wow, just psychologically, how do you manage it? Yeah. And as you say, like the bigger your platform, the bigger, like the bigger, the bigger the rock in the middle of the pond, the bigger the ripple and then like maybe it's a tidal wave that hits the shore.

JVN: Dang. Ok. You're coming through with these analogies today because this thing happens to my brain when like when I get in like a negative like comment thing with someone or like it's like that makes me like I get this like addicted part of myself that like, I can't stop checking, and it's not even just mine. It's like any drama like that in comments, I find myself like gravitating to that. So I feel like one of my 2024 New Year's resolutions is is to not keep kicking the like neurological tires in my brain of like drama and um even if I think that the drama is like, not important but like, like more about like reaching new hearts and minds, like I say, and not engaging with folks who are committed to fighting with me or like-

GRETCHEN RUBIN: Can I step in? My sister? Calls me a happiness bully. So can I step in and like make a, make a few suggestions of this resolution because this sounds really important to you? OK. So as you're framing this be concrete and specific about what you're asking of yourself? So like, what would that look like? Like if you're saying, I don't want it like, I don't want to go deeper into the, you know, I don't want to press the bruise or whatever. Does that mean you're not going to look at it? Does it mean you're only gonna do it one day a week? Does it mean you're gonna delegate that to someone else and say, tell me if I need to look at it and intervene? But otherwise I'm not gonna look at like, what would that look like for you specifically? Or maybe you need to, you need to think it over but sometimes like having an aim thinking can you limit it in terms of time? Like, so you're not like you do it for an hour in a time where you're like, I'm gonna sit down, I'm gonna be calm, I'm gonna, you know, I'm gonna be in a frame of mind, I'm not going to be like, racing through my day where I'm just feeling like these rushes of emotion in the middle of everything that's going on. And so it feels limited-

JVN: Yes, cause I'll do it like first thing in the morning sometimes and like, you know, everything feels worse, first thing in the morning, like everything just because you're kind of tired and, and everything just feels like a way more catastrophic. Yes.

GRETCHEN RUBIN: So, yeah, you might, you might and then just, it's like it's going to be this and so you're mentally prepared for it and then it just happens and then when it's done, it's done. So you don't feel like it's creeping into every part of your day. Here's something that's kind of fun. I don't know if it would help you with this issue, but it might, because it might make it feel less intense is if you change your phone to Gray Scale. So I read about this in life in five senses because like, people often can't put down their phones because they're just so entrancing. But if you turn your phone to gray scale, black, white and gray, it's just like a watching a black and white TV set, it's a lot harder to use. It's much more utilitarian. It might be that, that would kind of muffle the emotion because it would just feel sort of less, you know, energized. So I wonder if, when you were checking the comments you did that I wonder if just like, strangely that might make it feel more like words on a page and not like someone screaming into your face.

JVN: So my resolution is gonna be to set 30 minutes or an hour.

GRETCHEN RUBIN: Maybe you want to do it twice a day, shorter time. So that you feel like, ok, I'm kind of, I know what's going on. I don't know if you have sort of a feeling like I kind of need to monitor. Like I don't like.

JVN: Yes, yes I do. Yes. Yes. Ok. So yeah, like I could do like one morning, one night. It's like 20 to, can I be flexible, like 20 to 30 minutes but never more than 30.

GRETCHEN RUBIN: And I would set an alarm so it goes off so that you're not like getting, you know how you just go into the trance, the social media trance. So I would set a set an alarm and maybe you give yourself kind of like a warning, like five minute warning so that you're like, ok, I'm starting to transition out of this period. Um fin I'm finishing up because sometimes it can be very, if it's too abrupt, then you just blow through it. Um And here's the thing, I would try to do it in a place because this is clearly like very emotionally dra- it's, it's an emotional high and low. So it's like very emotionally charged. Try to do it in a way where you're like, ok, I'm doing this and like, I'm in a calm place, maybe there's like pen and pencil. So if you want to take notes or something, so again, you're like, you're, you're in a place to handle it even kind of physically like I'm comfortable, I'm calm. I'm not on the go, I'm not like, you know, walking through the airport looking at my phone-

JVN: Because I'll be like, sometimes I will get so mad, someone will say something really mean or like just, you know, really off kilter like literally like I'm not even being sensitive, like just like something really mean. I will end up blocking them and then everyone that like their comment, I will literally systematically lose like 20 minutes of my life or even longer. Like that's it brings out my inner crazy person like I'll go block 34 people that like that comment. So I just really like this limiting and it's going to like help my angry part not be so reactive -

GRETCHEN RUBIN: And here's something to think about too, like because of the the situation you describe, which is called if then planning, which is when you know that there's something challenging that's going to come up so often, it's like I exercise regularly but I'm on, I'm traveling or I'm sick or I hurt my foot or whatever. So if this happens, then what, what do I do? So it's like if I get a very nasty comment, then I will. What would, what do you think is the, like, what do you wish you would do? What do you feel like, like magical Jonathan

would handle it this way? Would it be like, I'll make a note of it on a pad of paper and I'll come back to it five minutes later after I've had some time to digest it. Is it, I will do five jumping jacks and then decide what I'm gonna do? Like what would be the, what would be the like ideal way to handle a - a really difficult comment?

JVN: Well the way that I've like been approaching it is that and I think this is healthy. It's like people don't get like, I'm not an elected official. People don't get like unfettered access to my Instagram. Like that's not a right.

GRETCHEN RUBIN: You're a mall -

JVN: Yes, I'm a mall. And so it's like if you come into my space and you say something really violent or abusive or whatever,

GRETCHEN RUBIN: If you want to eat my Auntie Anne's...

JVN: Yeah. And, and if you leave the like, I think just like delete the comment and block the person because it's like you don't get access here. Like you've shown that that's that you're not capable of like, you know, respecting me. It's like, why am I going to allow you in my space because it's not having like a discourse or like from a caring place. But then also I will say from my end because that's assuming that the comment lever is really in the wrong. There are other times where someone might leave a reasonable comment, but it might be that that was the 15,000 time I've read that critique or it might be that I had a really hard day and I'm just, you know, that comment just hit me at the wrong time at the wrong place and I might tie something back that like in the moment felt good, but then I end up feeling really bad about later. So in those cases, I don't really want to block the person because it was like I was being an asshole. And so I think either way those are kind of avoided if I am consuming these comments, like reading my comments when I'm in a calm stable place and in a at a set up time and I make a pre-agreement with myself that I'm not going to like comment with anyone in like a reactive angry space. And if I realize that I am, I'm going to just this 20 or 30 minute like morning or afternoon check in is over and I will come back to it later and-

GRETCHEN RUBIN: But uh and also like making sure that you're like not too hot and not too cold and not hungry like part but again, like I always come back to like our physical experience because it always colors it. And when you do something where you know it's gonna be challenging. It's like, you know, be in a comfortable chair, like, have a dog on your lap, like, whatever it takes to sort of be like, ok, now I'm gonna mindfully engage because I don't want you, you say you don't want to shut yourself off from this, like, you, you want to do this. But like, and I always feel, I don't know about you, but I always feel like if I have pen and paper, even if I never write anything down, I feel like, OK, I'm kind of at the ready to like if I have a thought or something, I don't know, to me that's calming.

JVN: I always have it.

GRETCHEN RUBIN: right. You just feel like you're at the ready. So um so I'm going to be so curious if this helps. So, so, you know, um

JVN: We're going to report back in March, we're going to do a post, we're going to report back in March. So- my resolution is a morning and a nighttime engagement time. And I was

wondering earlier if it includes just scrolling, which I got to say no because my ass is, but as far as like engaging in the comments on my post

GRETCHEN RUBIN: Because there's one you're consuming, but this you're engaging.

JVN: Yes. So I'm so and I actually because it doesn't take that long to read the comments, I don't need to get stuck down there for, I think it's 10 minutes in the morning, 10 minutes at night.

GRETCHEN RUBIN: And I wouldn't do it too close to your bedtime because it could get you up.

JVN: or like that, too close to, like, my waking because it's like, I, it can be. So I think it's like, yeah, mid morning and then, like, end of work day, that's going to be my resolution.

GRETCHEN RUBIN: I would consider setting an alarm for the, for the 10 minutes so that, you know, when your time is up. And as a questioner, you'll start to customize this and you're like, actually, I like to do 15 minutes at night and just five minutes in the morning or whatever or it's not enough time or it's plenty of time. Yeah, you'll, you'll start to customize it.

JVN: And I think the most, the more wide it angle solution is like not letting my well being be dictated by what's going on in the comments of my social media is like the wider resolution and also Gretchen, thank you for being so patient and kind and like, helpful with me making my resolution. I hope you guys thought about some of your resolutions as while we were doing that because that was everything. Um So we're rounding third base here. We're, we're coming into our final segment. So 24 just started. 2024 has just started, but it's never too late to start a a resolution because really it's, you know, January 3rd is everyone's listening to this. I think it's, it's the first week of January. So we have a lot of strategies on how to make a more effective resolution and customizing it for ourselves, understanding what personality type we are. Um But how can we be more playful in creating our New Year's resolutions? Like what's the happiness trifecta and what's like the word of the year?

GRETCHEN RUBIN: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So this is just for some people, they don't have positive associations with the ideas of a New Year's resolution. So, so there's playful ways, there's more fun, fresh ways to set yourself up. So one of them, um So, so on the Happier podcast, we talked about the trifecta. So these, these are three different approaches that you can use, you can use one of them, two of them, three of them. So one is to pick a one word theme for the year. So this is sort of an overarching theme that kind of sets the tone and reminds you of something kind of a big thing you want to keep in mind. Um Like one year I picked salt and that was to remind me to like add that like little extra element that's gonna boost the flavor and, and to have like salt is purifying and it preserves like I was really into preserving memories. So, and then, you know, like I got a Salt t-shirt from my sister that said salt on it. It was like, how did you get a Salt t-shirt? And she said it was part of a salt and pepper Halloween costume. So, who knew? So it can be fun to pick a one word theme. Um And, you know, and people often pick words that have multiple meanings and have a lot of personal reverberations for them. So that can be a really fun thing to do. Another thing is to do a 24 for 24 list, which is, you just write down 24 things you would like to do in 2024. They could be fun. They could be easy. They could be challenging. You can have fun

with the number 24. Like, I'm gonna read 24 novels or I'm going to, um, you know, uh, uh, try 24 new recipes or I'm gonna do two things every month to get to, I'm gonna do two new hikes every month to get to 24. So, having fun with a 24 for 24 list. Um, or you can, uh, do an annual challenge. So, do something for 24 minutes a day in 2024. Like, I'm in a garden 24 minutes a day in 2024. Uh, last year we did go outside 23 and 23 being, like, go outside for at least 23 minutes every day in 2023. It's just kind of, again, it's like a fun way. Yeah. Oh yeah, and it's so great. It's so many great things happen when we go outside. It's so fun. Um, but we did walk 2020 we did read 21 and 21 rest 22 and 22.

JVN: Um, what are you going to do by the time it gets to be like 35 and like 42?

GRETCHEN RUBIN: A lot of people are like, what about the 75 and 75 list? How are we gonna handle that? I'm like, ok, there's a lot of, you can do seven plus five. You can do, I mean, we'll figure it out and even with, even with 24 you can do 2 to 4. Like um we're gonna do. So for 24 it's write 24 and 24 you can write. So you can either write for 24 minutes a day, but it's enough just to write for 2 to 4 minutes a day. Like maybe you're just digging out yourself out from your emails or you're making a to do list every morning to set your priorities. Um 2 to 4 minutes or 24 minutes. You can choose either way you're still having fun with the 24. Again, it's a little bit whimsical, it feels a little bit lighter than maybe New Year's resolutions do.

JVN: And now people at the end of this podcast are just like I need more Gretchen in my life. Where are you the most active? What, what social are you on? I know that we can take the quiz. Um Where are you doing newsletters? I know we have the Happier Podcast. Where can people follow your work?

GRETCHEN RUBIN: All over the places! So, if you go to gretchenruben.com, that's, that's my site and you can find everything there, the quizzes and all my social and more there than you would ever want to know about habits for tendencies, happiness, all that. Um I'm on social as @GretchenRuben and all the places. Uh Yes, I have a podcast called Happier with Gretchen Ruben, where, which I do with my sister Elizabeth Kraft, who's a Hollywood showrunner. And we talk about how to be Happier. I have a weekly newsletter called Five Things Making Me Happy and you could get that on my, on my website and I love to engage with people. I've learned so much. I've gotten so many great suggestions and observations and insights. So um I love to engage with people on, on these subjects. So hit me up question.

JVN: Gretchen, thank you so much for coming on. Getting curious in our first guest of 2024. What a year? What a time? Thank you so much for coming on our show. We had so much fun,

GRETCHEN RUBIN: so much fun talking to you. I am such a long time fan of yours. It truly makes me happy to get to talk to you and I am so eager to hear how your engagement time ends up working for you.

JVN: I'm so excited about it. I wrote it down. I'm going to say this, this resolution. Thank you for coming on Gretchen and we appreciate you. Thank you.

You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. You can learn more about this week's guest and their area of expertise and the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on. And honey, there's more where that came from. You can follow us on Instagram @CuriousWithJVN. We are doing the most over there and it is so much fun. You can catch us here every Wednesday and also make sure to tune in every Monday for alternating episodes of Curious Now and Pretty Curious. Still can't get enough subscribe to Extra Curious on Apple podcasts for commercial free listening and our subscription only show Ask JVN where we're talking sex relationships and so much more. Our theme music is "Freak" by Quinn. Thank you so much to her for letting us use it. Our engineer is Nathaniel McClure. Getting Curious is produced by me, Chris McClure, Julia Melfi and Alison Weiss with production support from Julie Carrillo, Anne Currie and Chad Hall.