

# Girl, Wash Your Face? What Rachel Hollis Gets Right...and Wrong

Review by Alisa Childers



Rachel Hollis is taking the world by storm—and I get it. She's beautiful, smart, ambitious, funny, and a crazy good writer. I mean, the girl can tell a story that will have you crying one minute and shooting Diet Coke out of your nose the next.

She's carved out a nice little corner of the internet for herself, cultivating a community over a million strong and growing. She cooks, decorates, gives advice, and is known for her no nonsense honesty and humor. "I love Jesus, and I cuss a little. I love Jesus, and I drink alcohol. I love Jesus, and some of my best friends are gay," she recently posted on Facebook. She and her husband invite couples of all stripes (unmarried, married, same-sex) to take part in their couples conference, where the participants are encouraged to "learn some tangible advice. . .and make-out like a couple of teenagers."

To be honest, I hadn't heard of Rachel Hollis until last week when a Facebook friend wrote to ask if I had read *Girl, Wash Your Face*. She expressed some confusion over the messages in Hollis' book and on her social media, so I bought the book and read it over the weekend.

Hollis is a self-proclaimed Christian, and the book is published by Thomas Nelson (a Christian publisher). It's a *New York Times* bestseller and currently #1 in the Religion & Spirituality category on Amazon. References to the Bible, Jesus, her faith, and Christianity are peppered throughout the book. It's safe to say that this is not intended to be read as a purely secular self-help book. I won't kid myself into thinking this is some kind of devotional—but it *is* marketed as *Christian*. This will be an important thing to remember as you read this article.

It's no shocker that Hollis connects deeply with her audience. Having survived a difficult childhood and the suicide of her brother when she was still in her early teens, the advice she gives has not come cheap or easy.

There was that time her boyfriend continually treated her poorly. After dumping her and smashing her heart into pieces, he called to see how she was doing. When she calmly said, "Hey. I am done with this. I am done with you. Don't ever call me again," and shut off her phone, I was sending high-fives and a hearty, "You go girl!" Sadly, she didn't attribute this wisdom to knowing who she is in Christ. She credits self-love.

You see, someone can hold to false premises and still land on truth from time to time. Should we take care of our bodies and our hearts? Should we set goals and work hard to accomplish them? Of course. But as Christians, the *why* and the *how* are crucial. I find that Hollis has bought into five common lies that seem to be the starting point for all her advice.

### **Lie #1: You come first, and your happiness depends on you.**

Make no mistake, sisters. This book is all about YOU. In chapter one, she writes, "You are meant to be the hero of your own story," and "You, and only you are ultimately responsible for who you become and how happy you are." She plainly states, "You should be the very first of your priorities." The book is littered with references to "self-love" and "self-care." In fact, this theme is so pervasive that it forms the infrastructure for how she responds to everything from hardship to trauma to parenting to working out.

In all of these scenarios, the answer is always something like picking yourself up by your bootstraps and striving and trying and running a marathon and getting therapy and reciting mantras and reading a good blog post (she may be on to something there) and seeing a guru and drinking wine and not drinking wine and relaxing and taking a vacation and keeping the promises you make to yourself and. . .and literally *anything* but surrendering your life to Jesus and putting your trust in Him.

Your happiness, your success, your everything— it's all up to you, ladies. I don't know about you, but I don't think that's very good news. Jesus offers us true joy and peace, but only after we realize that we are not the center of our own lives and we are no longer in charge. He said, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” ([Matthew 16:24](#))

## **Lie #2: You should never give up on your dreams.**

Assuming you have a big dream to not give up on, Hollis spills quite a bit of ink trying to convince you that no matter what it is. . .you should never let it go. Her advice is to not take no for an answer. But instinctively, we all know this doesn't work, don't we? This is confirmed every time we cringe at the tone-deaf American Idol contestant screeching his way through the audition, only to be told he stinks. We wince when he cries and angrily promises to come back when he's sold more records than Justin Timberlake.

We all know he should give up on his dream. We all know it's not realistic.

What is Rachel Hollis' dream? I felt actual sadness when I read it:

*I'm a big fan of displaying visuals inside my closet door to remind me every single day of what my aim is. Currently taped to my door: the cover of Forbes featuring self-made female CEOs, a vacation house in Hawaii . . . and a picture of Beyoncé, obvi.*

Jesus never called us to chase after power, money, and fame (and He actually had quite a bit to say about those things). He called us to lay our pursuit of all that stuff down and follow Him. He said, “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” ([Matthew 10:39](#))

## **Lie #3: Religious Pluralism is true.**

Religious Pluralism is basically the idea that all roads lead to God. There is no right way or wrong way to think about God, and my religion is no better or more "right" than yours. This is a message Hollis shouts from the proverbial rooftops. The only problem? *It's a worldview.* It's an actual religious belief about God that claims to trump all others.

What do I mean? If you claim that all religions are equally valid and true, then you are excluding all religions that don't affirm that.

Hollis writes,

*. . . Just because you believe it doesn't mean it's true for everyone. .  
. Faith is one of the most abused instances of this. We decide that our  
religion is right; therefore, every other religion must be wrong.*

Logically, this sentiment can't be true—because all religions contradict each other at some point. And Christianity is, by nature, exclusive. Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father but by me." ([John 14:6](#)) Religious Pluralism is a dogmatic religious belief—and it contradicts Christianity.

### **Lie #4: Judgment is bad**

Every time you tell people to never judge, you are automatically committing the very misstep you're railing against. Just by saying, "Don't judge," you are judging those who (by your standard) are being super judgmental. This is highlighted in a particularly shocking section of chapter one in which Hollis gives a hypothetical example.

She asks you to imagine a friend named Pam who has started several diets, only to fail two weeks in and gain back all the weight she lost. She writes,

*Y'all, would you respect her? Would you count on Pam or the friend  
who keeps blowing you off for stupid reasons? Would you trust them  
when they committed to something? Would you believe them when they  
committed to you? No.*

So, if you fail at a diet and gain your weight back, you can't be trusted? I actually had to read that section three times just to be sure I wasn't misunderstanding her. I wasn't. Can you see how judgy this is for someone who has a [zero tolerance policy](#) for judgment on her Facebook page?

When giving practical advice on meeting new people and making friends, she advises that from the first handshake, "We pay attention to things like character and heart and wisdom and experience." But how can anyone evaluate those things in another person without judging? I'm not pointing this out to criticize, but to illustrate why "not judging" is not only impossible, but to preach it is self-defeating. We all make judgments—and what's important is that we judge *rightly*. Jesus said, "Judge with right judgment." ([John 7:24](#))

## **Lie #5: Sin is not the problem.**

This is the deepest and most pervasive lie that coils its way around the book like a python choking its prey. I saved it for last because it's the bedrock of what all the other lies are built upon.

I can't state this plainly enough. Sin is your enemy, and you absolutely cannot save yourself from it. You are not in control of *that* situation.

That may sound harsh, but it's actually the *best news ever*. You see, you and I are sinners. We can't get around it. Everything that's broken in our lives is because of sin. Because God is just and perfect, He can't tolerate sin or coexist with it. Sin must be paid for. There is no peace between God and sin. Justice must be done.

But this is where the good news comes in. God sent His Son Jesus to live a sinless life so that He could take the punishment of our sin on Himself. *He* paid for it. *He* took the punishment. Justice *was* done. If we put our faith in Him, we can be made right with God. That doesn't mean we won't still have our struggles, or that we'll magically have the power to never sin again. It means we don't have the same relationship with sin we had before. It means we've been declared "righteous," which means we have peace with God. The Bible even takes a step further—it says that God "adopts" us into His family.

Adopted by God Himself? That means I am not a failure—even if I never lose the baby weight (my "baby" is seven—don't judge). Even if I never successfully complete a diet. Even if I have a bad day and yell at my kids. Even if I never reach my financial goals or climb the ladder at my dream job. Even if my life consists of nothing more than living in quiet and humble service to God.

I'll be honest. Reading this book exhausted me. It's all about what I can be doing better and what I'm not doing good enough. How to be better at work, parenting, and writing. How to be less bad at cardio, sex, and you know, changing the world.

*But knowing the good news of who I am in Christ brings true rest.*

Rest from striving, my friend. Yes. Wash your face. Take care of yourself. Make good choices. But know who you are in Christ. If you let this truth become the foundation of how you see the world, you will be content to glorify Him in every situation, whether

you're cleaning bathrooms or relaxing at your beach house, changing diapers or crushing your career goals.