

COME THIRSTY

BY MAX LUCADO

CHAPTER ONE THE DEHYDRATED HEART

You're acquainted with physical thirst. Your body, according to some estimates, is 80 percent fluid. That means a man my size lugs around 160 pounds of water. Apart from brains, bones, and a few organs, we're walking water balloons.

We need to be. Stop drinking and see what happens. Coherent thoughts vanish, skin grows clammy, and vital organs wrinkle. Your eyes need fluid to cry; your mouth needs moisture to swallow; your glands need sweat to keep your body cool; your cells need blood to

carry them; your joints need fluid to lubricate them. Your body needs water the same way a tire needs air.

In fact, your Maker wired you with thirst—a “low-fluid indicator.” Let your fluid level grow low, and watch the signals flare. Dry mouth. Thick tongue. Achy head. Weak knees. Deprive your body of necessary fluid, and your body will tell you.

Deprive your soul of spiritual water, and your soul will tell you. Dehydrated hearts send desperate messages. Snarling tempers. Waves of worry. Growling mastodons of guilt and fear. You think God wants you to live with these? Hopelessness. Sleeplessness. Loneliness. Resentment. Irritability. Insecurity. These are warnings. Symptoms of a dryness deep within.

Perhaps you've never seen them as such. You've thought they, like speed bumps, are a necessary part of the journey. Anxiety, you assume, runs in your genes like eye color. Some people have bad ankles; others, high cholesterol or receding hairlines. And you? You fret.

And moodiness? Everyone has gloomy days, sad Saturdays. Aren't such emotions inevitable? Absolutely. But unquenchable? No way. View the pains of your heart, not as struggles to endure, but as an inner thirst to slake—proof that something within you is starting to shrivel.

Treat your soul as you treat your thirst. Take a gulp. Imbibe moisture. Flood your heart with a good swallow of water.

Where do you find water for the soul? Jesus gave an answer one October day in Jerusalem. People had packed the streets for the annual reenactment of the rock-giving-water miracle of Moses. In honor of their nomadic ancestors, they slept in tents. In tribute to the desert stream, they poured out water. Each morning a priest filled a golden pitcher with water from the Gihon spring and car-

ried it down a people-lined path to the temple. Announced by trumpets, the priest encircled the altar with a libation of liquid. He did this every day, once a day, for seven days. Then on the last day, the great day, the priest gave the altar a Jericho loop—seven circles—dousing it with seven vessels of water. It may have been at this very moment that the rustic rabbi from the northlands commanded the people's attention. "On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'" (John 7:37–38 nkjv).

Finely frocked priests turned. Surprised people looked. Wide-eyed children and toothless grandparents paused. They knew this man. Some had heard him preach in the Hebrew hills; others, in the city streets. Two and a half years had passed since he'd emerged from the Jordan waters. The crowd had seen this carpenter before.

But had they seen him this intense? He "stood and shouted" (nlt). The traditional rabbinic teaching posture was sitting and speaking. But Jesus stood up and shouted out. The blind man shouted, appealing for sight (Mark 10:46–47); the sinking Peter shouted, begging for help (Matt. 14:29–30); and the demon-possessed man shouted, pleading for mercy (Mark 5:2–7). John uses the same Greek verb to portray the volume of Jesus's voice. Forget a kind clearing of the throat. God was pounding his gavel on heaven's bench. Christ demanded attention.

He shouted because his time was short. The sand in the neck of his hourglass was down to measurable grains. In six months he'd be dragging a cross through these streets. And the people? The people thirsted. They needed water, not for their throats, but for their hearts. So Jesus invited: *Are your insides starting to shrivel? Drink me.*

What H₂O can do for your body, Jesus can do for your heart. Lubricate it. Aquify it. Soften what is crusty, flush what is rusty. How?

Like water, Jesus goes where we can't. Throw a person against a wall, his body thuds and drops. Splash water against a wall, and the liquid conforms and spreads. Its molecular makeup grants water great flexibility: one moment separating and seeping into a crack, another collecting and thundering over the Victoria Falls. Water goes where we cannot.

So does Jesus. He is a spirit and, although he forever has a body, he is not bound by a body. In fact, John parenthetically explains, "(When he said 'living water,' he was speaking of the Spirit, who would be given to everyone believing in him . . .)" (John 7:39). The Spirit of Jesus threads down the throat of your soul, flushing fears, dislodging regrets. He does for your soul what water does for your body. And, thankfully, we don't have to give him directions.

We give none to water, do we? Before swallowing, do you look at the liquid and say, "Ten drops of you go to my spleen. I need fifty on cardiovascular detail. The rest of you head north to my scalp. It's really itchy today." Water somehow knows where to go.

Jesus knows the same. Your directions are not needed, but your permission is. Like water, Jesus won't come in unless swallowed. That is, we must willingly surrender to his lordship. You can

stand waist deep in the Colorado River and still die of thirst. Until you scoop and swallow, the water does your system no good. Until you gulp Christ, the same is true.

Don't you need a drink? Don't you long to flush out the fear, anxiety, and guilt? You can. Note the audience of his invitation. "If *anyone* thirsts, let him come to Me and drink" (v. 37 nkjv, emphasis mine). Are you *anyone*? If so, then step up to the well. You qualify for his water.

All ages are welcome. Both genders invited. No race excluded. Scoundrels. Scamps. Rascals and rubes. All welcome. You don't have to be rich to drink, religious to drink, successful to drink; you simply need to follow the instructions on what—or better, who—to drink. Him. In order for Jesus to do what water does, you must let him penetrate your heart. Deep, deep inside.

Internalize him. Ingest him. Welcome him into the inner workings of your life. Let Christ be the water of your soul.

How is this done? Begin by heeding your thirst. Don't dismiss your loneliness. Don't deny your anger. Your restless spirit, churning stomach, the sense of dread that turns your armpits into swamplands—these are signal flares exploding in the sky. We could use a little moisture down here! Don't let your heart shrink into a raisin. For the sake of those who need your love, hydrate your soul! Heed your thirst.

And drink good water. You don't gulp dirt or swallow rocks. Do you drink plastic or paper or pepper? Mercy no! When it comes to thirst of the body, we've learned how to reach for the right stuff. Do the same for your heart. Not everything you put to your lips will help your thirst. The arms of forbidden love may satisfy for a time, but only for a time. Eighty-hour workweeks grant a sense of fulfillment, but never remove the thirst.

Take special concern with the bottle labeled "religion." Jesus did. Note the setting in which he speaks. He isn't talking to prostitutes or troublemakers, penitentiary inmates or reform-school students. No, he addresses churchgoers at a religious convention. This day is an ecclesiastical highlight; like the Vatican on Easter Sunday. You half expect the pope to appear in the next verse. Religious symbols are laid out like a yard sale: the temple, the altar, trumpets, and robes. He could have pointed to any item as a source of drink. But he doesn't. These are mere symbols.

He points to himself, the one to whom the symbols point and in whom they are fulfilled. Religion pacifies, but never satisfies. Church activities might hide a thirst, but only Christ quenches it. Drink *him*.

And drink often. Jesus employs a verb that suggests repeated swallows. Literally, "Let him come to me and drink and keep drinking." One bottle won't satisfy your thirst. Regular sips satisfy thirsty throats. Ceaseless communion satisfies thirsty souls.

Toward this end, I give you this tool: a prayer for the thirsty heart. Carry it just as a cyclist carries a water bottle. The prayer outlines four essential fluids for soul hydration: God's work, God's energy, his lordship, and his love. You'll find the prayer easy to remember. Just think of the word *W-E-L-L*.

Lord, I come thirsty. I come to drink, to receive. I receive your *work* on the cross and in your resurrection. My sins are pardoned, and my death is defeated. I receive your *energy*. Empowered by your Holy Spirit, I can do all things through Christ, who gives me strength. I receive your *lordship*. I belong to you. Nothing comes to me that hasn't passed through you. And I receive your *love*. Nothing can separate me from your love.

Don't you need regular sips from God's reservoir? I do. I've offered this prayer in countless situations: stressful meetings, dull days, long drives, demanding trips, character-testing decisions. Many times a day I step to the underground spring of God and receive anew his work for my sin and death, the energy of his Spirit, his lordship, and his love.

Drink with me from his bottomless well. You don't have to live with a dehydrated heart.

Receive Christ's *work* on the cross,
the *energy* of his Spirit,
his *lordship* over your life,
his unending, unfailing *love*.

Drink deeply and often. And out of you will flow rivers of living water.