

EXCERPT



Thirsting for Living Water
Finding Adventure and Purpose in God's Redemption Story

October 12, 2021 | \$22, 232 pages, hardcover | 978-1-5140-0292-6

When personal and global events threw Mike Mantel into a dark night of the soul, he embarked on a journey around the world to rediscover God's holistic gospel driven by compassion, justice, and mercy. Embark on your own adventure and open your eyes to the ways God is already at work at home, among neighbors, and to the ends of the earth.

The Work of the Master Strategist

As president and CEO of Living Water International, I work with churches across America and around the world that have enabled over six million people to access safe water and experience the living water of Jesus Christ since 1990. Here in the United States, I work with some church communities where people say church is where they come alive and change the world. The whole family participates, and they invite their friends to join them. In some of these communities nonreligious people get involved—because they want to change the world too.

I also see other kinds of churches. I see churches where people *want* to live into their highest ideals of “church,” but they're bored, they feel stuck, or feel like God is distant and uninvolved in their lives. In my experience, the first kind of church has identified where God is at work in the world and has found its role in that work, while the second kind has not.

My vantage point at Living Water International gives me a unique perspective on this dynamic. Part of our work is to help churches identify how God is moving in people's lives, communities, and the world and to equip them to connect with that work. We do this with churches in the United States and across Africa, South Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

I have a lot of sympathy for people who are not excited about church. There was a time when I felt that way too. In the prologue, you will learn how, in 1987, in Senegal, West Africa, I got my first glimpse of how God is poignantly involved in human affairs.

I did not go to Senegal to find God. I already knew God was an all-knowing and all-powerful Creator who sustains all things. I went to Senegal to help someone install a windmill pump on a water well because it seemed like an exciting adventure. Once there, seeing people dance with joy because they now had safe drinking water, I experienced the work of God as a Master Strategist who makes impossible things happen and who invites us to participate. I was undone to witness that God not only loves the Senegalese, but he included me in his redeeming work. I said yes to the God of this vision, and the next thirty years became one adventure after another on assignment for the Master Strategist who has guided me every step of the way.

Exactly thirty years later, in 2017, everything I knew about God as the Master Strategist began to unravel with such force it sent me spinning into the silence and darkness of doubt. In six short months, I faced death, economic crisis, leadership doubt, and natural disaster. After decades of Christian ministry leadership, my foundations were shaken: maybe God

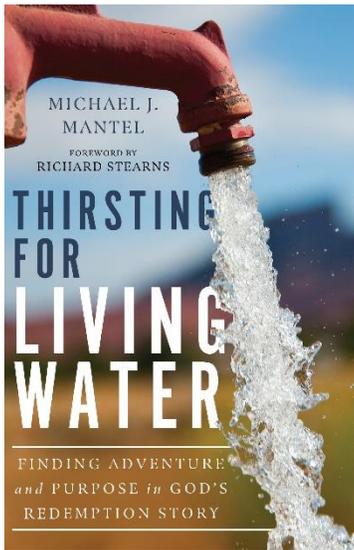


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*"I think Mike's page-turning journey in *Thirsting for Living Water* will stir your own memories and hopes—and could very well be the tool God is using to prepare you for the great adventure that he has prepared for you in his redemption story."*

—Richard Stearns, president emeritas World Vision US and author of *Lead Like It Matters to God*

is not the Master Strategist, inviting us to join him as he redeems the world, and providing for us as we go. Maybe God isn't involved in our affairs at all. Perhaps I had built my life on an illusion, and I had been inviting others to do the same all along. It seemed as though all the evidence was stacked against me. I saw no evidence of a coming resurrection, and big leadership decisions hung in the balance. This type of spiritual crisis is often referred to as the "dark night of the soul," a phrase taken from a sixteenth-century poem by Saint John of the Cross.

I had to dig deep for answers. *Thirsting for Living Water* is about the new hope I found in the light on the other side.

This book contains many of my stories; I hope that you are able to find your own stories while reading it. Most importantly, this is the story of the work that the body of Christ is doing in the world today.

Part 1—You Will Be My Witnesses—consists of four reflections drawn from my descent into the dark night of the soul that catalyzed the rest of this story. The anecdotes in this section will introduce you to my journey and invite you to reflect on your own journey, as well as your orientation toward the Bible, love, faith, hope, and the witness of God you are bound to become.

Part 2—In Jerusalem and in All Judea and Samaria—is a soul-searching journey back in time. These reflections are about some of the forces that shaped my faith and perspective of the church through the concentric circles and outward expansion of family, community, city, and the world.

Part 3—To the Ends of the Earth—is my journey around the world. It tells stories of God doing extraordinary things through ordinary people like you and me, and ordinary churches like yours and mine: "there," "here," and across the unified, global body of Christ. I believe the vision that emerges will fill you with new hope for the church that is more alive and filled with potential today than ever before in history and that invites you to participate in its richness.

As you engage with each of the twelve reflections, I invite you to allow the leading question to activate personal recollections my story prompts in you. As you consider the questions at the end of each reflection, capture key elements of your own story to later share with someone you trust.

Join me on this journey and emerge with a clearer vision of what is right with the church today. My deepest hope is that these stories—mine and yours—will be a catalyst to experience a deep, flowing river of hopeful reflections of how God is actively transforming this world through you, his people, the church, as we work together to bless others at home, among our near neighbors, and even to the ends of the earth.

—Adapted from the introduction

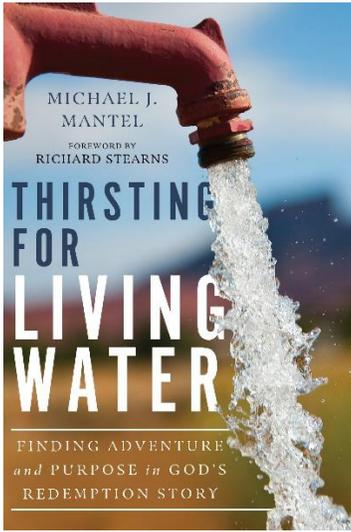


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Q & A



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Talking Points and Angles: Water ministry, water as the source of human flourishing, recognizing God's strategy and accepting God's invitation to join kingdom work, celebrating the global church and the diverse body of Christ, leading Christian ministries, and innovation in Christian ministry.

Launching a Global Conversation About God's Faithfulness

What inspired you to write *Thirsting for Living Water*?

Michael Mantel: What inspired me to start writing was different from what inspired me to continue, and different still from what inspired me to finish. At the beginning, I wanted to start a conversation about what's right with the church and how the church is working to address complex social issues. In the middle, what kept me going was being struck again and again by God's faithfulness. In my personal prayers, writing this book became almost an act of obedience where I felt God was saying, "Tell the story of my faithfulness." At the end, what inspired me to finish was excitement. I want to invite people to tell their own stories of God's faithfulness and the church's positive engagement in the world. These stories will fuel the change we long to live into.

This book highlights those moments when we all question God. What brought you back to his presence in your life?

Mike: God's presence never left; I just didn't experience it as tangibly as I had at other times in my life. Whenever I am worn down emotionally, psychologically, physically, that makes me less open or present to God's Spirit. In the midst of my exhaustion, I decided to take a walk back in time and around the world to think through my journey. As I did, I could see how God was always there, always working. That aligns with what God does throughout the story of the Bible. The Israelites would always forget how God brought them out of Egypt, and God would say, "Remember." That's why I really want people to tell their own stories of God's faithfulness. Because when we remember, we develop the power to recognize God's presence.

Most of the stories in this book occurred before Covid, and yet the message of the book seems to resonate with the uncertainty leaders are experiencing right now. What does this book have to say to a leader—in ministry or business—who might be feeling burnout or exhaustion or doubt?

Mike: Exhaustion, burnout, and doubt are part of a leader's reality. It's not a weakness, it's not failure, it's part of leadership. Everyone gets tired.

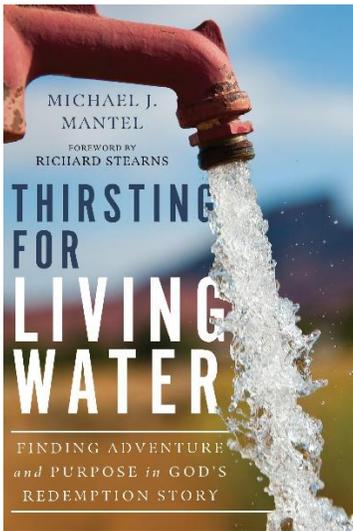


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Living Water International links arms with churches around the world to serve thirsty communities through access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene—and an experience of Living Water, which alone satisfies the deepest thirst. Over the past thirty years, this shared mission has blessed more than six million people in twenty-seven countries, projects that lead to physical and spiritual flourishing. Learn more about Living Water at <http://water.cc>

When that happens, it is important to protect, as much as possible, our minds and our bodies. Exercise, sleep, and diet are absolutely critical. So is linking arms with trusted friends and family members—your community. You can't go it alone.

Then, we have to remember that God prepares us for our challenges uniquely. The seeds to address the leadership challenges we currently face have been planted throughout our lives. God always prepares leaders for the task at hand. The key is to discover how he accomplishes this uniquely in your life. I hope the story arc of *Thirsting for Living Water* will quicken each leader's personal understanding of their own story as they address the leadership challenges of today.

The origin story of your work is one that crosses physical and cultural boundaries. What was the seminal moment when you were inspired to turn this trip into a lifelong mission?

Mike: As I relate in the introduction to *Thirsting for Living Water*, the trip that inspired me was one to Senegal. At that time, the only thing I was certain of was that God was alive and encouraging me to participate in his adventure. I didn't have the courage to think *lifelong* so when I felt that call, I made a three-year deal saying, "God, I'll give you 10 percent of my working life."

I stuck with that three-year pattern for fifteen years. Every three years, I went through a discernment process, and each time God wouldn't let me go but would accept my offer of another round. Eventually I said, "God, I'm sorry for making these three-year gigs. I know they're about me and not you. What do you want me to do?" I brought some friends together and we began to pray about my future. That's what led me to Living Water. It was then that I finally said, "Okay, God. I'm in this for as long as you want me."

What lessons do you hope readers take from *Thirsting for Living Water*?

Mike: We are greatly loved and never alone. I know that resonates with me, but I think it might resonate with others. God is almighty, all knowing, and resides everywhere. He is intimately involved in our human affairs. He is living! In fact, he is the Master Strategist who not only knows each of us but loves each one of us. He invites us, in all our misunderstandings, weakness, naiveté, and brokenness, to join with him.

What we do with our short life on earth has eternal consequences. I would love for people to say, "I hear this. I'm going to look at my life and ask where God has been at work and where I'm being invited. I'm going to do everything I can to make it the best life possible because it has eternal consequences."



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"There is no greater adventure or deeper purpose than saying 'Yes' to God and joining him in his redemptive story. The sooner and the more enthusiastically you do so, the deeper your joy."

—*Michael Mantel*

Serving God to the Ends of the Earth

Dr. **Michael J. Mantel** has dedicated much of his life to mobilizing churches to bring water to the world's thirsty while sharing the love of Jesus Christ. As the president and CEO of [Living Water International](#), a faith-based global humanitarian organization, Mike is a firm believer in the miracle of safe water, and in the biblical vision of the unity of the body of Christ.

Since 2008, Mike has led Living Water International through years of unprecedented growth by helping church communities around the world become more effective agents of gospel-driven change. *Thirsting for Living Water* is a response to the desire of many American churches to help their people *find adventure and purpose in God's redemption story*. Mike's thirty years of experience working with churches in the United States and around the world offers a unique perspective on the global church, as does his passion for helping church communities come alive through world-changing action.

After earning a business degree from Calvin College in 1983 and working in business for a decade, Mike witnessed firsthand the effect of water when he visited impoverished rural communities in Senegal, West Africa, where his then-employer was sponsoring the drilling of wells. It was during this trip that Mike felt a divine invitation to help thirsty people access clean water—a catalyst for physical and spiritual change.

Prior to joining Living Water International, Mike led various teams at World Vision, earned a PhD in organizational development from Benedictine University, enjoyed many years in business, and received the Distinguished Alumni Award from his alma mater Calvin College.

Recently honored by the *Houston Business Journal* as a [Most Admired CEO](#), Mike has authored, contributed to, or been featured in articles in the *Houston Business Journal*, *Houston Chronicle*, *USA Today*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *Christianity Today*, as well as other publications and a number of books.

Mike serves as an elder at Grace Presbyterian Church. He, his wife Natalie, and their four daughters have traveled the world in service with others, and he cherishes the opportunity to invite others to make a difference at home, among near neighbors, and even to *the ends of the earth*.



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