

# *Wine to Water: A Bartender's Quest to Bring Clean Water to the World*

By Doc Hendley

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Reviewed by:

**Vanessa Ball** (vanessaball@me.com), Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs, Development & Programs Graduate Assistant, Florida State University

*Wine to Water: A Bartender's Quest to Bring Clean Water to the World*, is part coming-of-age story and part call to action, as it chronicles the journey of Doc Hendley, a bartender-turned-humanitarian, as he struggles to make a difference by bringing clean drinking water to the developing world. Written with the candor and honesty of a private journal, Hendley tells his story in first-person as he blindly signs himself up for one of the most dangerous jobs in world: a humanitarian aid worker on the ground in Darfur. Despite numerous challenges and near-death experiences, Hendley's resounding message is clear: anyone can make a difference if they set their minds to it.

The book begins with a snapshot of Hendley's life before he dove head first into the world water crisis. A self-professed loner in high school, Hendley was the typical American bad boy, the son of a preacher-man who rebels in the pursuit of popularity. Hendley portrays himself as a relatively self-centered and selfish individual in comparison to the rest of his devout Christian family; riding his motorcycle, playing a few gigs, bartending, and preserving his bad boy reputation was all he cared about. Coasting along as the typical underachieving and backwoods redneck, Hendley befriends a fellow bartender, Tasha, who challenges him to do more with his life as he nears graduation from college.

While running an errand for his mother one day, Hendley meets a woman whose husband works for Samaritan's Purse, an international aid organization. Hendley is infatuated with the idea of working in the developing world once he hears about the adventures and dangerous lifestyle, coupled with the concept of doing "good" for others. Although he has an overwhelming desire to help other people, Hendley is largely ignorant of anything happening in the world outside of his bubble in North Carolina.

Shortly after his encounter with his mother's friend, Hendley dreams up the phrase, "wine to water." Completely unaware of the world water crisis at the time, Hendley is intrigued by the catchiness and biblical connotation of the phrase. Curious as to what is so important about water, he starts researching, only to discover the crisis at hand: a child dies every 20 seconds due to a lack of access to clean drinking water. As the statistics begin to overwhelm him, Hendley decides he has to do something to help and decides to throw a "wine to water" party to raise money for the cause. After quickly raising over \$12,000, he decides to invest the money in a non-profit, one in which the majority of the money will go directly to the cause.

Hendley decides to give the money to Samaritan's Purse and travels to their office to meet with Ken Issacs. Isaacs suggests that Hendley keep the money, go work for Samaritan's Purse on the ground, and then decide how to invest the money. Hendley agrees immediately and asks to be sent to the most dangerous location there is. Blithely unaware of the conflict in Sudan, Hendley signs himself up to be sent to Darfur, one of the most war-devastated regions in the world. Only after agreeing to go to Darfur does Hendley begin to research the conflict between the Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA) and the Janjaweed. Although his research reveals his ignorance and naiveté, it also serves as a foundation of knowledge for a reader who may be unfamiliar with the genocide occurring in Darfur.

Hendley's experience on the ground begins in Chapter 4 and sets the backdrop for the rest of the book. Through a roller coaster of trial and error and numerous episodes of self-pity, Hendley begins to learn about the needs of Nyala (Nee-a-la), the region in which he is stationed. Eventually, he enlists the help of two local men, Hilary and Amir, to assist him with a water project in a UN no-go zone. Hendley also befriends Andy, another man working for Samaritan's Purse, who has a passion for bringing education to the developing world. Together, the convoy of four men venture out to one of the most dangerous and devastated regions in the world. They quickly learn that fixing existing wells is faster and more cost-effective than drilling brand new ones.

The subsequent chapters detail Hendley's ambitious and dangerous mission to bring clean drinking water to those who need it most. From witnessing unimaginable episodes of violence, to being held at gunpoint and enduring intense culture shock during a visit home, Hendley recounts his emotional, physical, and spiritual journey with vivid detail and no-nonsense language. Hendley's return to the United States is a particularly relevant episode to discuss with students who may have studied or done service work abroad. Recognizing and managing culture shock is relevant as more students are encouraged to study abroad during their undergraduate years. Student veterans might also be able to relate to the post-traumatic stress that plagues him throughout his "R&R vacation" back at home. It is difficult for Hendley to relate to his family as he struggles to make sense of his life, both in Darfur and back at home; thinking about both parties' perspectives would be helpful during a debrief discussion.

Once he returns to Darfur, Hendley and Andy are joined by a new team member, Coy, who grew up in the field alongside his father. Hendley and Coy start boxing with each other to relieve their growing stress and tension. The water repairs continue, coupled with numerous setbacks, which range from Amir coming down with a severe bout of malaria, to a full-on ambush of the convoy in Chapter 12.

The violent ambush in Chapter 12 is a turning point in *Wine to Water*. Hendley begins to question whether the work he is doing is meaningful and if he is even making a difference in Darfur. Despite his team's hard work, the Janjaweed continue to destroy wells, the genocide continues, and families are ripped apart. His depression continues as he is sent to Kenya to meet with a Christian counselor to debrief and decompress after the ambush. Ultimately, Hendley cites a bare-knuckle boxing session with Coy as what got him through his anger and frustrations. Following the boxing match, the two men open up to each other about their hopes and fears; however, there are little to no details or introspection about their conversation.

Although it is clear that Hendley allowed himself to be vulnerable with Coy, the obvious lack of details and reflection on his part were troublesome. Throughout the novel, Hendley presents himself and his coping mechanisms in a hyper-masculine way, which is neither healthy nor beneficial. Dealing with his problems through drinking, playing the guitar, and fighting sends a mixed message about what it means to be a man. His bad boy persona and overall lack of transparency reinforces male gender stereotypes, which could spark an interesting conversation about perception and gender norms. Hendley also expresses discomfort in Chapter 5 when Ali, a high-ranking Muslim rebel leader with the SLA, held his hand as he brought him through his village. Despite his knowledge that this cultural gesture is completely platonic, Andy's juvenile reaction reinforces the gender stereotype underlying the entire novel. A discussion about cultural norms and gender roles would be beneficial when looking at these two events in the novel.

Hendley's spiritual journey is evident throughout the novel, but was highlighted in Chapter 14, when Hendley decides to start praying and being thankful for what he does have. Throughout *Wine to Water*, Hendley frequently expresses resentment towards Christianity and his identity as the "son of a preacher man." He reflects that his Muslim partners serve as a source of inspiration to him when he sees them perform their daily prayers, causing him to slowly rekindle his faith. Reading

the Bible within a new context gives Hendley strength, as he feels that he can relate to Jesus and his stories:

Instead of making me feel like I was being preached at or judged, the stories spoke to me. And what I read made me feel hopeful. It encouraged me that I didn't have to be a perfect do-gooder to actually do something good in this world. (p.165)

This section of the book would provide a great opportunity to have a conversation about students' spiritual journeys and the development of faith throughout one's lifetime. Hendley is far from eloquent in his personal reflection on the development of his faith, but it is relatable because of its rawness. The appreciation for a religion other than Christianity is another unique talking point; despite the appreciation, it seems as though Hendley never makes any attempt to better understand the Muslim religion. Perhaps if he had, he would have gained a better understanding of the people he was working with, particularly concerning how different religions deal with death.

The remainder of the book describes Doc Hendley's return to the US. After marrying his wife Amber, Hendley finally gets his non-profit, Wine to Water, off the ground. Despite numerous financial woes and mounting debt, the cause receives national attention when Hendley is nominated and recognized as a CNN Hero in 2009. The organization continues with water projects around the globe and was instrumental in bringing clean water to Haiti after the earthquake in 2010.

If *Water to Wine* is chosen for a new student reading program, it would be beneficial to have a book talk or facilitated discussions in first-year experience classes to focus on some of the heavier topics that are touched upon in *Wine to Water*. Getting students to think critically about some of the deeper issues of spiritual development and gender roles would help to enhance their reading of the book and hopefully stimulate individual introspection.

*Wine to Water* is an excellent choice for a new student reading program. Doc Hendley's story is inspirational because it shows how ordinary people can make an extraordinary difference in the world, even if they don't have the background or skills they might think they need to do so. The raw nature of Hendley's writing is relatable and poignant for students who might want to make a difference but don't really know where to start. Hendley's autobiography shows that there isn't just one blueprint students need to follow in college to be successful; what matters is that they just begin working on something they are deeply passionate about.