



1819 NEWS

Allen Mendenhall: Three days without hot water

[Allen Mendenhall](#) | 05.11.26



(iStock)

Some misfortunes arrive like gentlemen: with advance notice, a calling card, perhaps the decency to wait in the foyer. Then there are the misfortunes of a first Sunday in May, which descend the way Caleb, my youngest son, who turns two this month, approaches everything: at full speed and with no apology.

It began, as most domestic catastrophes do, with the purest of intentions. The boy needed bathing. He loves the warm water. Except that evening, the water never got warm.

I stood there turning the knob with the mounting pessimism of a man feeding quarters into a broken slot machine. Cold. Colder. A temperature one might charitably label *ambitious*.

I called the emergency plumber. He materialized, sympathized, analyzed, and then delivered the solemn news as doctors convey a death sentence: standing near the door, frowning. He'd have to return tomorrow.

By this point, darkness had fallen over the house with what seemed like editorial judgment. My older two, Noah and Gabriela, came bounding in from the yard, trailing the magnificent funk of youth who've spent an entire afternoon inventing new sports with the neighborhood children. They were fragrant. Biblical, even. They looked at me; I, at them. Then, as one, we regarded the shower. No one moved.

It was their mother who saved them, as mothers so often do, by simply having hot water at her house. The older children departed, leaving Caleb and me alone together in our cold little kingdom, two unwashed souls staring down the barrel of Monday.

The next morning, I woke up, worked out, went for a jog, came back smelling like a man who had done both, and then realized that the shower and I had an appointment we could no longer postpone.

So, I turned on the water and stepped in with tremendous trepidation.

I began with the left leg – *just* the left leg, mind you, like an illegal alien presenting his credentials at a border crossing. I soaped it, rinsed it – and survived. The right leg followed. Then each arm, introduced to the water individually, as though I were presenting them at a debutante ball.

The torso received the full sponge-bath treatment, a dignified arrangement I have not employed since approximately 1987. And then, with the spiritual resolve of a man who has made his peace, I plunged my head under the water, shampooed with the focused urgency of a bomb disposal technician, and in one final convulsive movement that can only be described as the *Demonic Hokey Pokey*, I jumped in, turned myself about, and shut off the water.

That, as they say, is what it's all about.

Two plumbers. Three days. To replace the water heater, one wanted \$6,660; the other, \$2,200. I'm a lawyer, but I'm not a fool.

Wednesday morning found me showering at the neighborhood clubhouse, a 40-something-year-old standing in a men's locker room with his soap bar and his dignity, nodding at passing strangers with the quiet camaraderie of the temporarily dispossessed.

Then I drove to Montgomery to preside over the Federalist Society luncheon – my last as chapter president after 13 years – delivering remarks but thinking about hot water the entire time.

I came home to find the plumber gone and – *finally*, mercifully – the water heater fixed. Hot water returned to the house like a prodigal son. I stood under it longer than was strictly necessary, letting it fall over me like an apology.

Here's what three days without hot water will teach you, if you're paying attention.

Every morning you turn that handle and the warmth comes, you're the beneficiary of a small miracle: sophisticated piping, circuit boards, the labor of innumerable people you'll never meet, all of it humming quietly behind your walls like a secret kept on your behalf.

Hot water is one of those gifts so constant and quiet that gratitude never quite finds its footing – until an ice-cold shower reminds you that someone, somewhere, made a decision that made your morning possible.

We're extraordinary creatures, we modern people, furious at a two-second delay, devastated by a dead phone battery, undone by a cold shower. Yet we are also, in our better moments, capable of standing under warm water and feeling, if only briefly, the glorious appreciation of one who's been cold.

Caleb, who understands none of this, got his warm washing on Wednesday night. He splashed in the water, rubber ducky in hand, delighted entirely by the present moment, unbothered by the past, incurious about the pipes.

He may be the wisest one among us.

Allen Mendenhall is a Senior Advisor for the Free Enterprise Initiative and a Research Fellow in the Thomas A. Roe Institute for Economic Policy Studies at the Heritage Foundation. A lawyer with a Ph.D. in English from Auburn University, he has taught at multiple colleges and universities across Alabama and is the author or editor of nine books. Learn more at AllenMendenhall.com (<http://AllenMendenhall.com>).

The views and opinions expressed here are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the policy or position of 1819 News. To comment, please send an email with your name and contact information to Commentary@1819news.com (<mailto:Commentary@1819news.com>).

Don't miss out! [Subscribe to our newsletter](https://1819news.com/newsletter-sign-up) (<https://1819news.com/newsletter-sign-up>), and get our top stories every weekday morning.

Tags: [alabama news](#) [hot water](#) [modern convenience](#)