

Sprinkle, Splash, or Dunk: How to Survive Your Swim in the Waters of Your Baptism

The Nowhere-Near-Complete Guide to Duke Youth Academy

Introduction

I always hated swimming lessons. As a kid, I remember hating the trip across town to the North Charlotte YMCA, the strange smell in the bathroom, and the inevitable departure of my mother for the bench at the far side of the pool. But what I really didn't like was that first step, that first moment when my feet left the firm concrete and I jumped into the liquid cool of the water. I knew that the pool was only four feet deep, I knew that the swimming instructor would be there if anything happened, and I knew that my floaties would keep me from sinking, but I still didn't like it. It was just too scary to be there in the water without anything under me except the unknown swirling depths. But after a few minutes of clinging to the side of the pool, I would usually get comfortable enough to paddle a little, and with a lot of persistent coaching by the swim teacher, I would be swimming laps by the end of the lesson.

You, my DYA brothers and sisters, are about to begin the biggest spiritual swimming lesson of your lives. As kids, we had to stay in the shallow end of the pool, and we could only begin to grasp the concept of God and what it meant to follow Him. As we got older, we could go a little farther, swim a little deeper, and understand a little more of what it meant to be a Christian. During the next two weeks, you will go farther and swim deeper than you ever have before, but even then you will have only broken the surface of the endless ocean that is the love, the very nature of God.

Like my childhood swimming lessons, DYA was sometimes uncomfortable and unnerving, but only because I was forced to think for myself, examine my own beliefs, and realize that, apart from Christ the solid rock, everything else is sinking sand. But once I took the plunge, I discovered I never wanted to go back to the shallow end of the Christian life. The two weeks I spent at DYA were some of the most mentally taxing, physically tiring, and emotionally draining of my life, but they were without a doubt, the best two weeks I have ever had. And by the end, I wept, as we all did, at the thought of leaving and returning to "the real world."

Your time here at Duke will be special beyond any words that I can write, and the only way to really know that is to live it out. So live it out to the fullest. God has brought you here to give you a vision of what life, your life, can be. Take it all in, and then go out and make it happen.

Writing to the church at Ephesus, Paul prays that the believers there, "being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." And as I prepare my meager advice to you, my brothers and sisters, that is my prayer too.

I think my dear friend Tessa Muggeridge said it best when she gave her advice to new DYAers: Have an open mind, take lots of notes, tell yourself it's okay to change, ask God to help you change, and just give up and follow the dress code.

After all, you may be swimming in the waters of your baptism, but you do have to keep your clothes on.

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5 Things To Remember As You Jump Into DYA**1. Journaling**

I don't think I can stress this point enough. I don't know how many times I have remembered my experience at DYA and wished that I had kept a record of what I saw, what I learned, and what I felt. If your experience is anything like mine, you will probably go back to your dorm at night dead tired with your head swimming from everything you've done that day. Some days you'll be overwhelmed about all the things you don't understand, some days you'll be overjoyed at the little that you do understand, some days you'll be amazed at the wonderful people around you, and some days you'll be so upset when you realize that DYA must come to an end. And you will feel like you just don't have the energy to do anything—much less sit and try to organize your thoughts on paper. But trust me: it is worth it.

When I read over the couple of journal entries I made during DYA, I am so thankful that I took the effort to reflect on my day, but I am also regretful that I didn't write more often. Those few entries remind me of those 30-second song samples on iTunes. They can tell you something about the song, about the day, about the experience, but more than that, they make you want more: to hear the whole song, to remember the whole day, and to immerse yourself once again in the entire experience. So buck up the 99 cents and spend a few minutes each night just jotting down whatever is in your head or on your heart at that very moment. You'll be glad you did.

2. Surveys

You will fill out a lot of surveys at DYA: before, during, and after. Get used to it. They can be annoying, but Katherine and the rest of the staff make you fill them out because they love you. So answer their questions honestly, thoughtfully, and completely. And do it all for the glory of God.

3. Cell phones

Submitted by a 2006 DYAer who asked to remain anonymous

Really don't bring your cell phone! And if you have to call your parents when you get there or something, don't bring your charger so you aren't tempted to talk on it. Having a cell phone screws up the whole community idea.

4. Naps

Forget whatever you were told about naps no longer being cool. You may have thought that you left nap-time behind when you gave up diapers and training wheels, but like strange fashions from the 70's, naps are coming back.

DYA is exhausting. If you don't believe me, wait a couple of days and reevaluate. But luckily for you, the staff knows that, which is why they built nap time into the schedule! So when you have the chance, curl up for a few minutes and rest your eyes. You'll be thankful you did—and so will the people who have to wake you up in the morning.

5. Liturgical Greeting

Many things at DYA are strange when you first encounter them, but after a few days, they will seem perfectly natural. Take the traditional DYA “shut up and pay attention” command.

Your mentors and RA's will not blow whistles to grab your attention, and neither will they shout or scream or use a megaphone. Instead, they will greet you in the name of the Lord. So when you hear someone say "the Lord be with you," pause the conversation, give you attention to the person speaking, and reply "and also with you."

NB: I intend this advice to be humorous, but also as a heads-up to those folks who don't come from a heavily liturgical tradition. Had I not spent the weeks leading up to DYA leafing through the Methodist *Book of Worship* and *The Book of Common Prayer*, I would have had no idea what to say when confronted with what I later learned to be a very common part of many church services. Also, just to stir the pot a little, any reform-minded Catholics should feel free to petition to change the response to "and with your spirit." Just a little denominational humor 😊

Chapter 2

Not Waving, But Drowning

When You Feel Like You're Sinking, Remember...

God is God Alone

I'll admit that this piece of advice is a bit tricky to put into words and may only apply to a few people, but if you're like me, it may prove helpful. If you're not, be thankful, and feel free to skip ahead.

DYA is amazing for many reasons, but one of the most important is its unique ability to both deconstruct and build up belief. Through plenary sessions, readings, discussions in mentor groups, and countless other DYA activities, your beliefs will be challenged. Hopefully nothing you encounter at DYA will cause you to give up your fundamental beliefs, but rather, to take a hard look at *why* you believe them and *how* they should be lived out. That is, after all, the purpose of DYA. Your professors and mentors aren't trying to drown you in the waters of your baptism—they are trying to help you dive deeper and go farther than you ever have before. But that process is sometimes uncomfortable, and it can lead a loss of hope and a sense of desperation.

For me at least, the great temptation when faced with challenges to my beliefs was to find someone or something I could comfortably believe in, something that felt good or seemed right, and then hold on tight, hoping against hope that the next plenary session or mentor group meeting would not force me to rethink that belief too. Right or wrong, I "believed" these things not because I actually believed them, but because believing in them was easier and less painful than truly examining my faith. The constant trial was not to take the phony, rosy faith easily within my grasp, but to instead seek out genuine belief, always just beyond my reach.

I say all that to say this: God is God alone, and it is in Him and Him alone that we find truth. In the whirl of thoughts and feelings that is DYA, it is easy to forget that, and to rely instead on your professors and mentors and friends as sources of truth. Make no mistake: your professors and mentors and fellow students are incredibly brilliant people with mountains of wisdom to share, and God will use them to speak to your heart, but never forget that they are not God, that they do not have all the answers, and that they are searching just like you are. Not even Dr. Hauerwas, with all of his your-salvation-is-in-jeopardy questions and irritatingly clever observations, is God. You will hear truth in many shapes and sizes at DYA, from staff and students alike, but remember that it is not truth because they say it is true, or because it is easy to believe, but because it comes from the mouth of Almighty God. Don't allow yourself to settle for anything less than the truth of God revealed in the word of God experienced by the people of God, because anything less than that is tragically false.

But just as God destroyed the earth in a flood so mankind could try again, so DYA will rebuild the faith it questions. In my own time at DYA, I found that after ruthlessly breaking down my prideful barriers to the truth, the experience set me on a rock-solid foundation for continuing my walk with God. I still had questions, doubts,

and confusions, but when I finally left DYA, I left with the faith that the One who loves me more than I could ever ask or imagine would be more than enough to cover my imperfections. And He has, because God alone is God.

God Works in Wonderfully Mysterious Ways

The following is an excerpt of an email I received from my pastor during DYA. I share it with you because it brought me a sense of comfort and joy at a time when I desperately needed it, and because of how accurately it describes exactly what I was feeling at the time I received it. I still remember sitting on the bed in my dorm as I read this email. I wanted to cry because I was so relieved that someone understood what I was going through and was there to help me through and, and I wanted to laugh because I could not believe how my pastor, who knew very little about DYA at the time, could describe how I felt so perfectly. There are times in my life that deeply and powerfully affirm my belief in God, and receiving this email was one of those times.

I have no idea how you are feeling at this point, but let me take some guesses and try to offer some insight off those guesses. I am willing to bet that your head is swimming at this point. You might feel like you have been tossed into a raging sea and you are struggling to keep your head above water, to make sense of everything. You might feel like you have been trying to get a drink of water from Niagara Falls. If these metaphors are true, do not worry, it is natural. Every now and then, when I engage in learning like you are doing right now, I begin to feel that way. It bothers me because I have a hard time grasping everything. If you are feeling this way, it is ok. Remind yourself that you do not need to have everything figured out right now. You will have time to process all the information later and God will bring to the surface the really important things you are supposed to be learning. Trust in God's timing.

You may also be experiencing the growing pains of going deeper into your faith. Whenever you are exposed to things like the Duke Youth Academy, you are forced to rethink (or think for the very first time!) what you really believe and how you arrived there. This can be a very painful process of discovery. It may feel like someone has pulled your foundation out from underneath you and you are now free-falling. Once again, trust in God and God's timing. While this process is painful, you will always end up better because of it. The true test of your new knowledge will be the fruit of the Spirit. Over time, are you more loving, patient, kind, good, etc.? Remember, as Paul says, knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Your new knowledge can be really dangerous if it is not applied correctly.

Another problem you may be experiencing is a frustration with your language and communication. You have all of these thoughts rolling around in your head, and it may seem like your mouth cannot communicate to others what you thinking in your brain. If this is happening (or may happen when you try to explain to your parents/grandparents what you have learned), do not worry. Essentially, you are learning a whole new language, and it takes time to become a better communicator of that language. Try hard not to get frustrated if people do not understand what you are saying. It will come with time.

Appendix A

Oswald Who?

The following are some daily readings from Oswald Chambers' *My Utmost for His Highest*. I'm sure many of you are familiar with the book, but for those who aren't, I wholeheartedly recommend it—ask a mentor or look for it at the Divinity School bookstore. But regardless of whether you read it daily or have never turned a page, the truth in Chambers' words is still the same, and during my time at DYA, I looked to *My Utmost for His Highest* for comfort and for guidance, and found both. My hope is that you may find your hopes, fears, and dreams expressed in these passages just as I did, and that you may draw closer to God because of it.

In the entry for March 22, Chambers writes that "We cannot stay on the mount of transfiguration, but we must obey the light we received there; we must act it out. When God gives a vision, transact business on that line, no matter what it costs." This message is the core of the passages that follow. Chambers reminds us again and again that our faith rests not in knowledge or experience or emotion, but in the very person of Jesus Christ. At DYA, that is so easy to believe, so easy to hold to, but when you leave, everything around you tells pulls you away from that vitally important truth. Chambers describes this struggle better than I ever could, so I leave you with his advice, that you may do your utmost for God's highest.

April 16th.

Can You Come Down?

"While ye have light, believe in the light." John 12:36

We all have moments when we feel better than our best, and we say - "I feel fit for anything; if only I could be like this always!" We are not meant to be. Those moments are moments of insight which we have to live up to when we do not feel like it. Many of us are no good for this workaday world when there is no high hour. We must bring our commonplace life up to the standard revealed in the high hour.

Never allow a feeling which was stirred in you in the high hour to evaporate. Don't put your mental feet on the mantelpiece and say - "What a marvelous state of mind to be in!" Act immediately, do something, if only because you would rather not do it. If in a prayer meeting God has shown you something to do, don't say - "I'll do it"; do it! Take yourself by the scruff of the neck and shake off your incarnate laziness. Laziness is always seen in cravings for the high hour; we talk about working up to a time on the mount. We have to learn to live in the grey day according to what we saw on the mount.

Don't cave in because you have been baffled once, get at it again. Burn your bridges behind you, and stand committed to God by your own act. Never revise your decisions, but see that you make your decisions in the light of the high hour.

August 27th.

Theology Alive

"Walk while ye have the light lest darkness come upon you." John 12:35

Beware of not acting upon what you see in your moments on the mount with God. If you do not obey the light, it will turn into darkness. "If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" The second you waive the question of sanctification or any other thing upon which God gave you light, you begin to get dry rot in your spiritual life. Continually bring the truth out into actuality; work it out in every domain, or the very light you have will prove a curse.

The most difficult person to deal with is the one who has the smug satisfaction of an experience to which he can refer back, but who is not working it out in practical life. If you say you are sanctified, show it. The experience must be so genuine that it is shown in the life. Beware of any belief that makes you self-indulgent; it came from the pit, no matter how beautiful it sounds.

Theology must work itself out in the most practical relationships. "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees . . ." said Our Lord, i.e., you must be more moral than the most moral being you know. You may know all about the doctrine of sanctification, but are you running it out into the practical issues of your life? Every bit of your life, physical, moral and spiritual, is to be judged by the standard of the Atonement.

October 1st.

The Sphere of Exaltation

"Jesus leadeth them up into a high mountain apart by themselves." Mark 9:2

We have all had times on the mount, when we have seen things from God's standpoint and have wanted to stay there; but God will never allow us to stay there. The test of our spiritual life is the power to descend; if we have power to rise only, something is wrong. It is a great thing to be on the mount with God, but a man only gets there in order that afterwards he may get down among the devil-possessed and lift them up. We are not built for the mountains and the dawns and aesthetic affinities, those are for moments of inspiration, that is all. We are built for the valley, for the ordinary stuff we are in, and that is where we have to prove our mettle. Spiritual selfishness always wants repeated moments on the mount. We feel we

could talk like angels and live like angels, if only we could stay on the mount. The times of exaltation are exceptional, they have their meaning in our life with God, but we must beware lest our spiritual selfishness wants to make them the only time.

We are apt to think that everything that happens is to be turned into useful teaching, it is to be turned into something better than teaching, viz., into character. The mount is not meant to *teach* us anything, it is meant to *make* us something. There is a great snare in asking - What is the use of it? In spiritual matters we can never calculate on that line. The moments on the mountain tops are rare moments, and they are meant for something in God's purpose.

October 2nd.

The Sphere of Humiliation

"If Thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us." Mark 9:22

After every time of exaltation we are brought down with a sudden rush into things as they are where it is neither beautiful nor poetic nor thrilling. The height of the mountain top is measured by the drab drudgery of the valley; but it is in the valley that we have to live for the glory of God. We *see* His glory on the mount, but we never *live* for His glory there. It is in the sphere of humiliation that we find our true worth to God, that is where our faithfulness is revealed. Most of us can do things if we are always at the heroic pitch because of the natural selfishness of our hearts, but God wants us at the drab commonplace pitch, where we live in the valley according to our personal relationship to Him. Peter thought it would be a fine thing for them to remain on the mount, but Jesus Christ took the disciples down from the mount into the valley, the place where the meaning of the vision is explained.

"If Thou canst do any thing . . ." It takes the valley of humiliation to root the skepticism out of us. Look back at your own experience, and you will find that until you learned Who Jesus was, you were a cunning skeptic about His power. When you were on the mount, you could believe anything, but what about the time when you were up against facts in the valley? You may be able to give a testimony to sanctification, but what about the thing that is a humiliation to you just now? The last time you were on the mount with God, you saw that all power in heaven and in earth belonged to Jesus - will you be skeptical now in the valley of humiliation?

May 1st.

Insight Not Emotion

"I have to lead my life in faith, without seeing Him." 2 Corinthians 5:7

For a time we are conscious of God's attentions, then, when God begins to use us in His enterprises, we take on a pathetic look and talk of the trials and the difficulties, and all the time God is trying to make us do our duty as obscure people. None of us would be obscure spiritually if we could help it. Can we do our duty when God has shut up heaven? Some of us always want to be illuminated saints with golden babes and the flush of inspiration, and to have the saints of God dealing with us all the time. A gilt-edged saint is no good, he is abnormal, unfit for daily life, and altogether unlike God. We are here as men and women, not as half-fledged angels, to do the work of the world, and to do it with an infinitely greater power to stand the turmoil because we have been born from above.

If we try to re-introduce the rare moments of inspiration, it is a sign that it is not God we want. We are making a fetish of the moments when God did come and speak, and insisting that He must do it again; whereas what God wants us to do is to "walk by faith." How many of us have laid ourselves by, as it were, and said - "I cannot do any more until God appears to me." He never will, and without any inspiration, without any sudden touch of God, we will have to get up. Then comes the surprise - "Why, He was there all the time, and I never knew it!" Never live for the rare moments, they are surprises. God will give us touches of inspiration when He sees we are not in danger of being led away by them. We must never make our moments of inspiration our standard; our standard is our duty.

About the Author

Why do I care? You probably don't. But thanks for reading this far!

Are all his jokes this bad? Why yes, thank you for asking.

Who at DYA will vouch for this guy? His lovely and talented former mentors Emily Shore and TJ Lang for starters.

Who has some embarrassing stories to share? See above. His dear friend Carolyn Stotts would also be happy to oblige.

Is he coming to visit? Couldn't keep him away. Date to be determined.

How do I contact him? andrewrphillips@gmail.com. He never gets email, so please feel free to send some along.