

# “Floaties”

by Angela Georgantas



The smell of the water always made Jayla so happy. She squeezed into the gym ahead of her mom, pulling her hand toward the pool area with purpose. “Jayla!” Her mom exclaimed, laughing while she untangled the strap of her bag caught on the door handle. “Sweetie, hold on just a second. We’ll get there!” The day had finally arrived when Jayla was old enough for swim lessons. Her older brothers and sisters had all taken lessons when they were little, and Jayla was the last. She had always watched from the sidelines, splashing her little toes in the water, eager to dive like the big kids. It was all her mom could do to keep her safe around the water.

When they got to the locker room, Jayla lifted her sundress over her head, revealing the shiny blue swimsuit with the ruffles underneath. She was so proud when her mom put it on her for the first time. She remembered running her hands over the ruffles and imagining they were waves of cool blue water. She handed her mom the dress and kicked off her flip-flops. Her mom just had time to scoop them up and place them into the bag before rushing to meet her at the door to the pool.

“Now, Jayla,” her mom said, kneeling down in front of her and catching her eyes. “You are going to listen to the Teacher, right? You’re going to follow instructions and not try to get too deep too fast?”

“Yes, Mommy,” Jayla said – and she meant it. She was going to be the best swimmer in the family. She was going to listen to everything her Teacher told her and be ready to swim in the big pool in the back yard with her brothers and sisters this summer. “I’ll be careful!” She reached for the door handle, giving it a big pull. “Welcome!” said the Teacher when all the swimmers had gathered by the stairs to the shallow end of the pool. “If everyone will just get your mom or dad to help you with your floaties, we can start the class in just a moment.”

Jayla looked over at the bright colored pile of inflatable armbands at the side of the pool. Some of the closer kids were already picking up a couple and getting their parents to help them put them on. She reached for the nearest two – both bright pink – and handed them up to her mom with impatience. While her mom secured the inflatable bands, Jayla took a moment to actually look at the pool. A strip of blue and white beads roped off the shallow end all the way across the long, narrow pool, and just on the other side there was a larger area with several kids diving and playing. The class would stay in the small narrow strip, each swimmer making his or her way across the pool. Only those who listened to the teacher and made it to the other side of the pool would get the certificate of completion at the end. “All right everyone, let’s get into the pool!” The Teacher blew a small whistle one short blast, and kids got into the water. Some stepped in gingerly, one toe at a time, stopping to get used to the cool temperature of the water. Some others, more daring, jumped in all at once, gasping but smiling at the cool shock of water. “Look up here, everyone,” the Teacher was saying, raising His voice over the talking and squeals of excitement. “It’s very important that you follow instructions so that you will know just what to do.” Most of the kids were paying attention, but no sooner did the kids get into the water, that some of them started dog paddling for the larger strip of pool. Testing the buoyancy of their floaties, they bobbed up and down, mimicking the play on the other side of the strip.

Some of the kids in the free play area called to them, challenging them to come to the other side. No matter how many times the Teacher called them back, He couldn’t keep them from at last sliding over the line of blue beads and into the play area. As soon as that happened, they threw off the floaties, leaping for the edge and walking their way along the rim of the pool to get to the other kids. Jayla saw the other kids flip their bodies over to the other side of the pool, marveling how they could give up their opportunity to get their certificate for a few minutes of water play with the Teacher who was speaking.

“Okay, everyone kick your legs and put your arms out t other kids. She turned back to her o the front, like this. Keep your eyes on me.” The young Teacher put His arms out straight and showed them how to make strokes with their arms while they kicked their legs. Again, another group of kids was not listening. This group was staying on this side of the line, but they were kicking their legs with their arms held tight to themselves, going in circles. No matter how many times the Teacher tried to get their attention or show them how to move in a forward motion, they just kept spinning. Pretty soon, some of them spun themselves right over the rope into the free play area. Others just got tired and paddled over to the side of the pool, stripping off their floaties as they ran to find mommies and daddies. Instead of listening, they tried to do it their own way and ended up either right in the middle of the splashing, diving kids playing in the bigger area of the pool or too tired to continue the class. Either way, the floaties came off, and the kids spent the rest of the time in the free play area.

Now there were just a few kids left, and Jayla was one of them. By this time, they were nearly halfway across the pool, and Jayla could almost taste the moment when she would reach the other side. A few times she got distracted by the antics of the kids in the free play area and bumped into the side, and a few times, she found herself kicking or spinning without forward motion, but she noticed that her Teacher was very patient. The only time she had problems was when she took her eyes off her Teacher and tried to do it her own way. When she listened to her Teacher's voice and did what He asked, she made forward motion toward her goal. Pretty soon, Jayla had fixed her eyes on her Teacher for good, and nothing else would distract her after that. "You did it!" Her Teacher cheered to the very few kids who were left at the end. He pulled each one out of the water by both hands, their little happy legs kicking and dripping in the air, and each one received a high five. "Okay, guys! Floaties off!" All the kids stripped off their floaties and tossed them in a pile near the Teacher's feet. "You guys head on over to the carpeted area for juice and a snack, and I will be right back with your certificates." The kids squealed happily, tired but with enough energy to skip over to the big purple rug by the pool office.

"Thank you," Jayla said, remembering her manners when a young female life-guard handed her the little juice pouch and bag of crackers. She had done it! She had listened to her Teacher and would get the certificate that meant she could swim with her brothers and sisters in the big pool this summer. Then Jayla sat down to rest. All the kids who jumped into the pool did so with floaties. Floaties represent the grace of God that holds us up so we don't sink. The small strip of pool where the class was taking place represents the narrow way, and the larger area of the pool where kids were diving and playing represents the world and its worldly pleasures.

The kids who didn't make it to the end represent those people who start out believing in God and accepting his free gift of salvation but don't quite make it until the end. The first group was bobbing up and down on their floaties, testing the grace of God. Some Christians test God's grace by mimicking the world, trying to be like it when God says we are not of this world. In the story, those swimmers started in the narrow area, but were actually acting like those in the free play area. They refuse to listen to the voice of the Teacher and leave the narrow way, some of them without even realizing it. God's grace, the floaties are tossed to the side as they conform completely to the way the other children look in the broader section of the pool. The other kids who don't quite make it to the end are the kids who didn't progress across the pool but just spun in circles until they either spun themselves into the free play area or simply got too tired to continue and decided to sit in the shallow end instead. This represents those Christians who, instead of listening to the Bible and the Holy Spirit, have started following today's other popular gospels. Maybe it's the prosperity gospel that spins people right into worldliness and worry about money and material things or Christianity tainted with New Age ideas like meditative yoga or aligning the frequencies of one's chakra. Both of these are carnal and take Christians off the narrow path, sometimes without them even knowing it.

Or, maybe it's dominionism that places hope in mankind instead of Jesus as a savior of the world or the Hebrew Roots gospel that tells people to follow the dietary laws of the Old Testament instead of resting on God's grace. These are the ones who get so tired doing all the work for themselves that they end up too tired to finish the class. These are just a few examples of the many ways people today can be led away from the gospel of the Bible and the narrow way. The kids who did make it are those who will overcome, but even this group had its troubles. The name Jayla, means "Overcomer." Even Jayla bumped into the side when she started to pay too much attention to the free play area, and she got tired when she used too much energy to spin. Sometimes believers will get momentarily distracted by the carnality of the world or a new theological doctrine, but the difference in the overcomers and those who would not make it to the end is that the overcomers listened to the Teacher's voice, and watched for His leading. The Bible says in Matthew 7:21, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."

When the kids who make it to the end come out of the water, they throw their floaties at the feet of the Teacher. This represents the twenty-four elders who cast their crowns at the feet of Jesus. When it is all said and done, it is by His grace through our faith that we will finish the race and earn the prize of the high calling of Jesus. Without the floaties, not a single swimmer could make it to the other side. Without the Teacher's voice leading us where we need to be, we would all be left to bump and spin. By keeping our eyes on Him, we will one day find ourselves in His rest: "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." Are you trying to be like the world, making excuses for the Bible or ignoring it completely to conform to the world's ways? Have you left the narrow road without even knowing it because you refuse to listen to the voice of God, calling you back to God's Word and God's ways?

Or have you been distracted by another gospel? Are you spinning yourself tired by trying to earn your salvation by works, observing dietary laws or feasts, or focusing on political solutions to a spiritual problem? Have you left the narrow path for financial success or a New Age spirituality that doesn't rely on the finished work of the cross? Are you staying true to the true good news of the Bible and listening for the Holy Spirit to lead you into all righteousness? In this world of increased travel, technology, and knowledge, it is easy to get distracted by all the different ways to either enjoy the pleasures of this carnal world or get lost in information and doctrine that keeps us from following God Himself. Only those who keep their eyes on Jesus and listen for His voice will make it to the end to find their rest and reward.

Salvation is there for the asking. If you're ready, you can pray like this: "Jesus, I believe that you shed Your blood, died on the cross, and rose from the dead for me. I repent of my sin. I ask you to forgive me and come into my heart. Help me to live for You in Jesus' name. Amen."