

FEBRUARY 2024

Together

AT DAWSON



2023
AT A GLANCE

SUPPORTING
SHORT-TERM
MISSIONS

DAWSON'S
DAY SCHOOL
CELEBRATES
10 YEARS

GET TO KNOW
**GRACE
KLEIN**
COMMUNITY

**REGGIE,
SET, GO!**

Meet **REGGIE HATCHER**
Dawson's Associate
Minister of Recreation



Life's Better Together

There's a Life Group for you!

PRESCHOOL
KIDS
STUDENTS
COLLEGE
YOUNG ADULTS
ADULTS
SENIOR ADULTS

dawsonchurch.org/lifegroups

Together

AT DAWSON



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dawsonchurch.org/AfterThoughts

WATCH LIVE
live.dawsonchurch.org



JOIN US

Sunday Morning Worship:
8:30 a.m., 9:45 a.m. & 11:00 a.m., Sanctuary
Hispanic Worship: 11:00 a.m., Chapel

From



Dr. David Eldridge
Senior Pastor

Pastor David

Dear Church Family,

As you receive our newest edition of the *Together at Dawson* magazine, we are just a few weeks into the new year. Did you make a New Year's resolution? If so, how are those New Year's resolutions going? I read one study where researchers found that only 9% of Americans actually complete their resolutions. You probably aren't surprised to know that 43% of people who make resolutions give them up by the end of January.

If that is you today, I've got some good news for all of our resolution breakers. As a follower of Christ, we can be grateful that our God is always consistent, even when we can feel the natural pull of inconsistency. His grace never fails, and His power never wanes. This is good news for us as we are still in the early weeks of 2024.

Every day of every year, we can celebrate that God is still at work using His imperfect people. Every day of every year, He is faithful to provide us opportunities to join in His work. In these pages, we celebrate the many ways that God is at work in and through His people that call Dawson their faith family. As you read, you will be inspired by His faithfulness in this past year and discover new ways that you can join His mission to make disciples of all nations in 2024. There are new faces and new opportunities that we want to celebrate.

This year, I pray that these stories will continue to inspire us to seek God's leadership in our life and in our church. May His faithfulness fuel our faithfulness in 2024.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Eldridge". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Pastor David



Life Group Stories

By Laura Glaze

My husband, Jeff, and I began teaching a Newly Married Life Group class in November 2022 after a group of young adults completed **Together For Life**. After a dozen years teaching in student ministry, we were drawn back to disciple young married couples as we had done previously. We helped recruit Steve and Jeannie Rice to teach with us, and later, William and Rebekah Black joined the teaching team. It's a great combination of teaching styles and life experiences. We all have a heart to help young married couples grow in their relationship with one another and, more importantly, with the Lord. Building friendships is so important for married couples. We love encouraging these couples to find Christian friends. These friendships will play a major role as they share in the ups and downs of life, as they pray for each other, and as they challenge each other to seek and honor Christ individually and as a couple.

Several members of our class often tell us that the community has been the greatest part of being in this Life Group. A member who has been with the class since the beginning said, "It is rare to find a solid group of believers in the same life stage and that is exactly what we have found!" Being able to provide a place for these couples to meet, study God's word, and build friendships is what we desired. Several of the couples are new to the Birmingham area, so Dawson, and specifically this class, provides community. Class members express that they are so thankful for the friendships the Lord has provided.

In addition to leading Bible study every Sunday morning, we also led a Wednesday night book study over the summer where the ladies and guys met separately. This helped the class members get to know one another better and grow even closer. It also allowed for more prayer time and opportunities to share on a more personal level. One couple said, "We have been challenged by other couples to love one another like Christ loves the Church. We are able to dive into a biblical perspective of marriage and hold one another accountable." As the leaders of the class, this is exactly what we had prayed for before the class was ever formed.

Not only do we have weekly Bible study together, but we also share in some pretty fun social activities. Game night is the biggest hit for this competitive group! Another favorite for the ladies was a flower arranging and baking night. (The guys were invited to join us but they chose to go out for barbecue and Topgolf instead.) Recently, we began to include service opportunities for the class at Kids Connection, KidLife and in the community. We hope to provide more opportunities for the couples to volunteer and serve in the future.

WE HAVE BEEN CHALLENGED BY OTHER COUPLES TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER LIKE CHRIST LOVES THE CHURCH.

Jeff and I still remember the friendships we made early on in our marriage and we still have many of those today. Those relationships are so precious to us and have been a vital part of our lives. To be able to bring these couples together, to motivate them to study Scripture, to pray together, to navigate trials together, and to celebrate joys together is such a gift to the both of us. As is often the case with serving others, we are the ones receiving a great blessing as they keep us feeling more like a young married couple. We see their excitement and joy in the newness of marriage and love. It motivates us to not let complacency and staleness seep into our own marriage. Instead, these couples remind us the need to constantly grow and celebrate our own love. Our desire for strengthening and bringing unity to their marriages spills over into our marriage. While we are the ones teaching, the energy and enthusiasm that they have as newlyweds is inspiring. As we spend time with these couples, we experience their thirst for God's word, and we are confident in this next generation and how they will step up to lead at Dawson in the years to come.



Laura Glaze and her husband, Jeff, have been married for almost 30 years and Dawson members for a majority of that time. They have three adult daughters and one son-in-law. They are passionate about teaching, encouraging, and mentoring young married couples, and they enjoy spending time with their family, traveling, and drinking good coffee.



The theme of DNOW 2024 was **To Be Found Faithful**. We were led to worship God wholeheartedly by Andrew Morris and taught about God's faithfulness by our speaker Chris Brooks. Over the weekend our students served at 13 different mission sites, as they lived out their faith. Our students also made incredible memories at our late-night activities, building deep friendships rooted in Jesus. We are so grateful for the faithfulness of our 26 host homes, 69 small group leaders, and countless volunteers who helped create a weekend where students could worship God and learn about his faithfulness and what it looks like to be faithful to God.

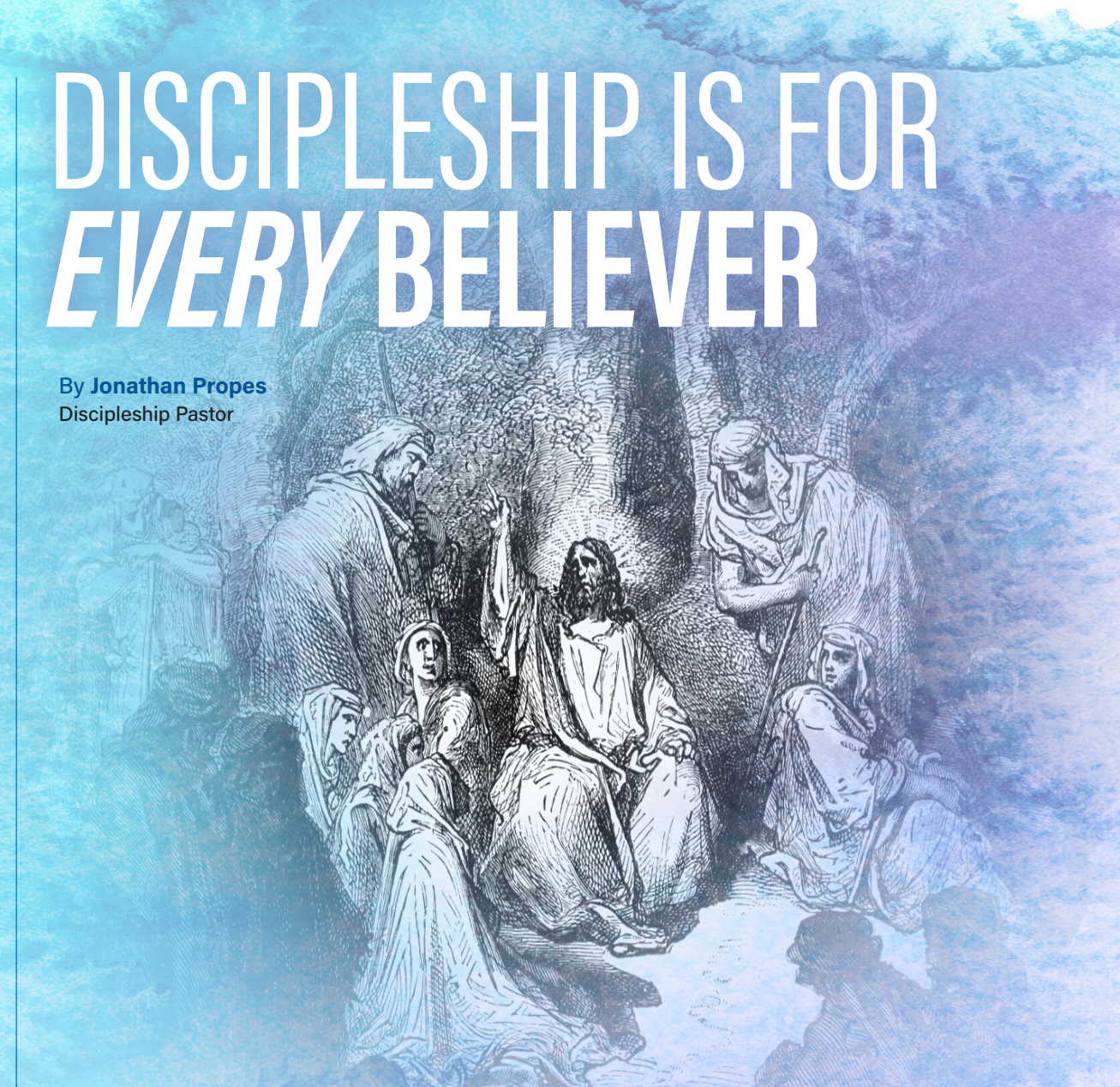
Dawson Student Ministry Team





DISCIPLESHIP IS FOR *EVERY* BELIEVER

By **Jonathan Propes**
Discipleship Pastor



A basic Google search for the word **disciple** yields countless pages of results. The term disciple is used more than **250** times in the Gospels and the book of Acts. It refers to a **student** or **apprentice**. Disciples in Jesus' day would follow their rabbi wherever he went, learning from the rabbi's teaching and being trained to do as the rabbi did. It's impossible to be a disciple or a follower of someone and not end up like that person. Jesus said, "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40).

Discipleship is a widely-used word associated with a variety of definitions related to growing in our Christian faith. Bill Hull, author of *Disciple-Making Church*, defines discipleship as “the intentional training of disciples, with accountability, on the basis of loving relationships.” Robby Gallaty, author and Senior Pastor at Long Hollow Church in Hendersonville, TN, builds on this definition in his book, *Growing Up*. He defines discipleship as “intentionally equipping believers with the Word of God through accountable relationships empowered by the Holy Spirit in order to replicate faithful followers of Christ.”

At Dawson, we equip believers to grow as disciples of Jesus because the Lord’s commission and our calling is to make disciples of all nations. We see this picture in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18–20: *And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

In *Gospel Centered Discipleship*, author Jonathan Dodson labels the Great Commission as the Gospel Commission and highlights its three important aspects: Go, Baptize, and Teach.

GO – This is the missionary aspect. Every believer is to participate in taking the Gospel to others.

BAPTIZE – This is the relational aspect. Every believer should instruct all who believe upon Christ to announce their relationship with Him and His people through the symbolic act of baptism.

TEACH – This is the rational aspect. Every believer is to teach others about Jesus and how to follow Him.

Why do we see so little discipleship taking place in the Church today? Do we really believe that Jesus commanded His early followers to make disciples but wants the twenty-first-century Church to do something different? Francis Chan, a widely-known Bible study author and pastor, addressed these attitudes regarding discipleship when he said, “We have moved so far away from Jesus’ command that many Christians don’t have a frame of reference for what discipleship looks like.” Likewise, Robby Gallaty responded to the same concern by stating, “In order to make disciples, we must first be disciples.”

As a disciple of Jesus, we already have what it takes to offer discipleship to our friends, family, coworkers, and neighbors. Discipleship is not about being an expert. It’s about passing on to others what you are learning as you grow in your own relationship with Jesus. A seminary degree or Christian leadership position is not a requirement to “go and make disciples,” as Jesus called us to do in the Great Commission. All you need is to be who God created you to be and recognize that you have what it takes to grow in Christ and help others do the same.

We must remember there is a difference between teaching and discipleship. Giving Jesus greater lordship of our lives doesn’t happen from simply listening to sermons or reading books. It must be followed with obedience. We need to be doers of the word, not just hearers.

In her book, *Ordinary Discipleship*, author Jessie Cruickshank provides us help with a better understanding of how we learn. Neurologically speaking, “head knowledge” and “heart knowledge” are two distinct types of long-term memory: semantic and episodic. Semantic memory is your collection of data, facts, and concepts. Episodic memory includes procedural memory or muscle memory. As you can imagine, semantic memory is easily forgotten, but episodic memory is a much stronger memory system because it is interconnected with empathy, compassion, and other social emotions. It is also integrated with our body systems, like heart rate or fear response. Episodic memory is the only memory system that can project into the future and answer the question, “How can I apply this to my life?” Semantic memory cannot do that.

Knowing this information helps to explain how discipleship can be very difficult when only teaching through lecturing—which goes straight to the semantic memory system. Expecting head knowledge to become heart knowledge is not how God created us to learn. Discipleship takes place best in a biblical community where we can have conversations centered on the truth of God’s word and integrate those truths into our daily lives.

Do you have a desire to form a disciple-making relationship with others? Let me encourage you with these three practical steps:

STEP 1: PRAY

The Holy Spirit will bring people to your mind who have a desire to begin a disciple-making relationship. As you pray, keep the following in mind: Like attracts like. People naturally move toward those who seem helpful. You may be attracted by a person’s personality, spirituality, ministry skills, or experience.

STEP 2: SCHEDULE ONE-ON-ONE CONVERSATIONS

Sit down face-to-face with people who have a desire to grow in their faith and invite them to participate with you in a discipleship group.

STEP 3: FORM YOUR GROUP

Schedule a time with a member of the Discipleship Team so we can help you with the structure of your group and provide you with helpful discipleship resources.

These steps have helped me in my journey as a disciplemaker. I share them here in hopes they will also help you.



JONATHAN PROPES was born in Kentucky and grew up in Tennessee. He holds a Master of Divinity from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and has previously served churches in Kentucky, Illinois, and Tennessee. He is married to Elaine and has two children, Mary Beth and Ben.



AT A GLANCE



2,145

Average Worship Attendance



145

New Church Members



1,665

Average Life Group Attendance



427

Average Weekly Bible Study Participants

60



Baptisms



485

First Time Guests



26

Family Dedications



45

1st Graders Received Bibles



44

Couples in Together for Life



108

AUXANO Average Attendance



400

Handwritten Notes of Appreciation
Sent To Our **72** Veterans



7399

Social Media Followers



65

Women's Table Groups



7,500

Average Weekly Households
Watching Our TV Ministry



505,487

Website Page Views



378

Average Weekly Livestream Views



1,075

Preschoolers & Kids at KidLife



450+

KidLife Volunteers



117

Hispanic Summer Outreach Attendees



71

KidLife Gospel Conversations



314

DNOW Students

123



Hispanic Retreat Attendants



2,197

FRC First Time Visitors and 5605 Unique Users



157

Adults & Students on Chapel Choir Mission Tour



39

New Sanctuary Choir Members



291

Kids at Recreation Summer Camps



11,386

DMA Lessons Given to 337 Students

Thank you Facilities Team!



57

Spaces Renovated/ Refreshed or Reconfigured

113



Ballet Students



253

Kids at Summer Music Camp



9,394

Wednesday Meals Served



50

Orchestra Members Playing 18 Different Instruments



788

Work Orders Completed



4,070

Candlelight Attendees and Live Streamed on 814 Devices



5705

Resource Space Setups



MISSIONS



15

Church Planting Partnerships



120

Coy Backpacks Collected



73

The Learning Center Students



104

Team Participants On
13 Mission Projects



5

Families Stayed in
the Missionary Houses



46

TLC Volunteers Invested
More Than 700 Hours



23

Students in Hispanic Ministry
Training Institute



322

Operation Christmas Child Shoeboxes



7

GED Graduates from
The Learning Center



376
Coats Purchased



350
Christmas Stockings



2,100
Children Served



400
Packages of School Supplies



575
Spiritual Support Sessions



5000+
New & Gently Used
Books Given To Children



900
Pairs of Athletic Shoes Distributed



400
New Toys Given at Christmas

2023

FINANCIAL INFORMATION



TITHES & OFFERINGS

11,703,598



EXPENSES

11,022,776



RESERVE FUND BALANCE

1,161,086



22%

Missions, Ministry
& Music



18%

Operations



18%

Facilities
Support



42%

Personnel

CELEBRATING A DECADE OF



By **Brooke Gibson** | Minister to Preschoolers

In the Bible, Jesus shows His great love for children and teaches us that the early childhood years are a prime time to lay a foundation of faith. In Matthew 19:14, He says: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." The Dawson Day School, a weekday ministry of Dawson, partners with Dawson's Preschool Ministry to seize every opportunity of these critical years to fill young hearts and minds with the truth about our great big God and His abundant love and good plans for them.

While the Arendall Building was under construction in 2011, Dawson was also making plans to use the new space for a morning preschool program for Dawson families and for the community. It was a happy day when Kathy Daniel, a teacher and Dawson church member, agreed to become the Director of the new Dawson Day School. Soon after, she began networking with other local preschool directors, creating policies and handbooks, ordering supplies, and recruiting teachers. From the beginning, Kathy was clear that she wanted to create a program that had a family feel and intentionally taught about Jesus. With those goals in mind, she crafted this mission statement:

The Dawson Day School is dedicated to enriching the spiritual, physical, and intellectual development of all children in our care; helping them realize their fullest potential in a warm and loving Christ-centered environment. We are to be found faithful as we share the love of Christ in the Birmingham community.

The Dawson Day School opened its doors for a "soft opening" in January 2013 with 25 students and 6 teachers. In 2023, we celebrated a decade of the Dawson Day School.

Today, the program has:

- **110 students**
- **25 staff members**
- **72% of our students (62 families) are non-Dawson attendees**

The Dawson Day School is open Monday–Thursday, 9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m., and classes are available for children ages 18-months to 5 years old. The days children attend are determined by their age group. Somewhat unique to the Day School is our Pre-K option, lovingly known as the "Busy Bee Class." This class offers an extra year of preschool learning before beginning Kindergarten.

A typical day of school includes group time teaching, learning centers, crafts, lunch and snacks, chapel time, and playing with friends in the gym and on the playground. Students also enjoy special events throughout the year like theme-related dress up days, Hosanna Parades, Easter Egg Hunts, Thanksgiving Programs, and Year End Celebrations.

Kathy leads a staff of incredible women, most of whom are Dawson members. These teachers love the Lord and desire to faithfully care for, educate, and point children to Jesus.

A current Day School teacher, Annie Ayer, describes her experience like this, "The Day School has been a special part of our family for years. Both of our boys have attended, and I am now blessed to serve as a teacher for two-year-olds. The teachers here truly love the children as their own and enjoy pouring Jesus in to their little hearts!"

Because preschoolers learn through play, the Day School teaching team is creative and intentional as they prepare engaging, hands-on, age-appropriate activities for them to enjoy.



Teachers use this engaging curriculum to prepare the children academically for elementary school by teaching colors, numbers, letters, and basic information about the world through fun learning units such as All About Me, Community Helpers, and Farm Life. But they are also helping the children grow socially by teaching them to be kind, to take turns, and to work together with their peers. Most importantly, the Day School staff partners with parents to guide their children's spiritual development as they teach Bible stories and simple Bible truths like: "God made you. God loves you. Jesus wants to be your friend forever."

While the ultimate goal is to connect preschoolers and their families to Jesus, we pray that our Dawson Day School families feel welcomed to connect with the Dawson Family of Faith as well. We often remind them that they are invited to everything that happens on Dawson's campus. We make it clear that if they already have a church home, we encourage their commitment to that congregation but hope they will think of Dawson as their second church family. And, if they do not have a church home, we invite them to join us on Sunday mornings for worship and Bible study.

We are thankful for the ways that Dawson's Preschool Ministry and the Dawson Day School partner together to strengthen the spiritual development of children and their families. The most obvious way this happens is through Bible teaching. Day School classes follow along with the Preschool Bible curriculum used on Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights, teaching the same weekly Bible stories and monthly Bible verses. The Day School's weekly chapel time is led by our Preschool Ministry's Worship Leader, Jessica Orso, who uses many of the same praise songs. Additionally, the holiday Family Faith Talks created for Dawson Preschool Ministry families are also given to Day School families for

Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter seasons. Many Day School families attend our DPM Family Nights and KidLife—and several parents as leaders!

Through the years, the school has also served as an introduction to other Dawson ministries, specifically Dawson Ballet and the Dawson Music Academy.

Reflecting on a decade of memories, Kathy is most proud of the times that the Dawson Day School introduced preschoolers and their families to the love of Jesus, helped children get special help when needed, came alongside families to offer help and encouragement during trying times, and celebrated important family events like births, adoptions, and healing.

One Day School mom, Katie Crawford, who has been a DDS mom from the beginning, sums up the ministry of the Dawson Day School best. "For 10 years now, Dawson Day School and its people have been a rich blessing in the lives of our children and in our family. We are members of another church in the area, but we always felt comfortable calling Dawson home, too—because the Day School has been just that.

From safety during Snowmageddon to prayers and support following the critical illness of a child, partnering with Dawson in raising our kids has been a wonderful experience academically, personally, and spiritually. Most of all, the staff and teachers at the Day School love our children, and they love the Lord. Every part of the school points back to Christ and His work, and we all, kids and parents alike, seem to learn so much from this special place. We truly treasure the Dawson Day School and we always will."

The Dawson Day School is a gift to our church and to our community. We look forward to many more decades of sharing God's love and His word with the children and families who are influenced by its ministry.



"All four of our children have attended Dawson Day School, with so many of their core memories coming from within the walls of their preschool classrooms at Dawson. It's been a pivotal part of their early learning years, and our family has been immensely blessed by the wonderful staff and many incredible teachers who have loved our children well and pointed them to Jesus.

This year is our 10th year at the Day School, and we're so grateful to God for leading us to this preschool. He has used it in many ways to nurture our children and enhance their spiritual and educational growth. We are also grateful to Dawson for always inviting their preschool families to church-wide events. Though we attend another church in Homewood, Dawson has always been our second church home and continues to serve us through KidLife, preschool ministry activities, summer camps, and other community outreach efforts."

— Tiffany Adams



Brooke Gibson serves as Dawson's Minister to Preschoolers and is passionate about sharing God's love and His word with young children. Brooke's family joined Dawson when she was six months old, and she is thankful for the many milestones Dawson's church family has celebrated with her, including baby dedications, baptisms, weddings, and funerals. She is married to Darrell, and they enjoy traveling and spending time with their adult children and grandson.



THE **PRIORITY** OF PRAYER

By **Frances King Abrams**

The first time I prayed, *really* prayed,
my prayer was simple and desperate: "Help me, God!"
Growing up in church, I had not yet encountered
a personal God who cared about me.

voiced that desperate prayer in the Prayer Garden at Ridgecrest Baptist Assembly in North Carolina. I struggled with typical, though real, teenage distresses: relationships, fear of the future, and my life's direction. Although I didn't yet know saving faith, I knew God was present, and I hoped He would hear me. The following year, my high school senior year, I thought little about God or my desperate prayer. But, behind the scenes of my life, God was at work. The next summer I joined a college Sunday School class, where our teacher explained salvation as a "new birth" (John 3). She also emphasized from 1 John 5:13 that if I trusted in the Son of God, I could KNOW I had eternal life. That truth was new to me and unsettling.

In my room, alone, I prayed, "Jesus, I've been trying to live a Christian life on my terms (good deeds outweighing the bad), and that is not working. I want to do this Your way, so please forgive me, come into my life, and make me a new person." 2 Corinthians 5:17 promises, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; old things have passed away; behold, new things have come" (NASB).

God had answered that first "Help me!" prayer according to His will, in His time. He had used a godly teacher and Scripture memory verses from childhood like John 3:16 to prepare me for that pivotal moment. The transformation God initiated after my second heartfelt prayer eventually led to 40 years as a pastor's wife and a lifetime journey of prayer.

I am thankful that we worship a God who is true to His promises and hears our prayers. As I continue exploring the vastness of our all-knowing God, I am amazed that He hears and answers the prayers of millions of believers who are praying simultaneously. I do not know how He does that, but I need only to know that He is God, our Father, and His heart is big enough for all of us.

The Bible has no shortage of teachings on prayer and examples to follow. Dawson's Theological Vision includes these verses under *Prayer Is Our Priority*:

John 15:5, Acts 2:42, Philippians 4:6, Psalm 145:18, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, and Hebrews 4:16. The familiar Model Prayer (The Lord's Prayer) in Matthew 6:9-14 teaches us *priorities* to include: hallowing God's Name (worship), God's will to be done on earth as in Heaven, trusting Him for our daily needs, and forgiving transgressors.

HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER

We can learn about Jesus' priorities for believers from His High Priestly Prayer in John 17, during which He prayed for His followers, their character, and their future. His prayer came immediately before His betrayal and arrest leading to His crucifixion. In the latter portions of this prayer, Jesus poured out His heart to the Father for His disciples and for those who would believe in Him through their witness. Those disciples include us! So, how did Jesus pray for His followers?

Verse 11: that God would keep them in His name, that they would be one, even as God the Father and the Son are one.

Verse 13: that His joy would fill them.

Verse 15: that God would keep them from the evil one.

Verse 17: that God would sanctify His disciples with His truth, His word.

Then, in verses 20-21, 23, Jesus prayed for future believers when He again asked the Father for our unity. (I am sure that Jesus knew His followers would be prone to squabbling. He had already seen this in His disciples.)

In verse 24, Jesus prayed, "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given me, be where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved me before the foundation of the world."

Though Jesus prayed for His followers to join Him in Heaven, sometimes we hold too tightly to this world. Eternity is incomprehensible to us, but Heaven is real. Jesus desires our presence there when we complete our work on earth. That is why this verse comforted me once I understood that it was not God's will to heal my husband, Jerome, of brain cancer. Realizing that Jesus

prayed for us to be where He is affirms that our mortal bodies were meant to be temporary.

In verse 26, Jesus emphasized that He had made His name known to His disciples, so that the love of His Father would remain in them. He cares not only for our physical needs but also the spiritual growth of His followers, our unity, love, and victory over Satan as we live obedient lives.

FROM THE APOSTLE PAUL

In Ephesians 3:14-19, the Apostle Paul prayed that the Ephesian believers would: 1. be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; 2. that Christ would dwell in their hearts through faith; 3. that they would be rooted and grounded in love; 4. that they would comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of His love; 5. that they would know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, and; 6. that they would be filled up to all the fullness of God.

Our Life Group has a prayer ministry through which emails with current prayer requests, collected each Sunday and throughout the week, are sent to members. Each request includes the email address of the member making the request, so members can send notes of encouragement.

Praying individually or corporately, we can apply the ACTS principle: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. When the prayers voiced by Jesus and the Apostle Paul in the passages above are our models for intercessory prayer, we are living testimonies that prayer is our priority. We can rest assured that our Heavenly Father hears and answers according to His will.



Frances King Abrams has previously worked as a newspaper journalist and freelance writer. She has authored two books, *The Widow's Song*, a devotional for widows, and *A Frog Named Abraham* for children. She has been a Dawson member since 2014 and is active in the Sanctuary Choir, Dawsonaires, Byrd Life Group, and recently, the Sanctuary Orchestra.

FINDING MY FAITH



Introducing
Fernando H. Vera Sr.
Dawson's Newest Hispanic
Church Planting Resident

Fernando H. Vera Sr. with his wife, Maria, and sons Joshua and Fernando Jr.

In 2021, Dawson began an effort to plant five new Hispanic churches in Alabama by the end of 2025. To do this, we developed a Hispanic Church Planting Training Program to prepare church planters for the task. Our first two residents, Humberto Medina and Juan "Pipi" Aristizabal, have completed their training and are now planting churches in Huntsville and Alabaster. In October of 2023, Pastor Fernando Vera became our third church planting resident. Following is his story of how he came to know Christ and was called into ministry, in his own words.

I was born in Salvatierra Guanajuato, Mexico, into a Catholic home. My parents taught us how to be good Catholics. I still have memories of all of us going to Mass together and praying the rosary.

During my grade school years, my family relocated to the city of Celaya because of better school opportunities. When we moved, we left behind all my extended family. When I was ten years old, I became an altar boy in the church of "Our Lady of the Poor," and for almost three years I did not miss a day of Mass. I became very religious, to the point that I wanted to become a priest. Our local priest, Father Pedro, began to help me prepare for seminary and the priesthood. But God began to get my attention as I started reading the Bible for myself. I remember once when I was reading John 14:6, a question came to me: "If Jesus is the only way, what about the saints and the virgin Mary?" When I shared my doubts with Father Pedro, he told me it was a good thing to have more help getting into Heaven, and Jesus would never deny a request from His own mother to allow someone into Heaven. This convinced me for a while, but I still had doubts and began to stay at home and not attend Mass.

When I started high school, the death of my grandmother led me to seek God once again. I thank God that one of my best friends, Luis, worked in California one summer. When he finished his work, he went to a Christian camp where he accepted Christ. When Luis came back home, he shared Christ with me. I listened attentively as he shared his testimony with me. I then chose to accept Christ—but I only had an intellectual understanding of the Gospel, not a true, personal faith.

In the summer of 1985, my mother was diagnosed with cancer, and I became her primary caregiver. As I helped care for her, I realized that not only elderly people die, but also young people. This led me to ask if I were to die, where would I spend eternity? This question impacted me so much, and I reverted back to my old beliefs. I went directly to Tepeyac to see the Virgin of Guadalupe and prayed to her to intercede for my mother and me. I did this for a long time, but it never changed my longing for answers. My desire for inner peace grew. I wrote a letter to my friend, Luis, and told him that I wanted him to tell me more about Jesus. Luis gave me his Bible with his notes showing me the plan of salvation. I began reading the Bible for myself, and for my mother, and I began to feel a strong desire to know God.

One night I read that God "is knocking at my door." It was then that kneeling by my bed I declared to God "I want You to come into my life!" For the first time, I fully comprehended what the Gospel is about and what it means to follow Christ. I accepted Jesus as my only and sufficient Savior. I then told my older sister what had happened to me, and I shared the plan of salvation with her. By the grace of God, she accepted Christ as well.

After I accepted Jesus as Lord, Luis began to disciple me, but I was reluctant to leave the Catholic church. I tried to share Jesus within the church, but without success. I realized it was time to go. Once I joined another church, I was able to grow and experience Christian fellowship. My sister invited me to a Bible study led by missionaries Daniel and Beverly Kendall, and my desire to serve God grew and grew.

I was married on April 14, 1990, and entered an undergraduate seminary in August 1991. After graduation, my wife, Maria, and I had the privilege of opening a new church in Sarabia (half an hour from Celaya) in 1996. By 2000, we had established a wonderful congregation and a strong leadership team, but God had other plans for us. We were invited to the United States to serve in a Hispanic church in Louisiana—Iglesias Biblica Berea in the New Orleans area. We had never planned on ministering in the United States, but we decided that if it was God's will, He would open the door for us. We were right, God did open the door for the move. Since that time, we have had the privilege of working for 18 years in several different churches and ministries in the New Orleans area.

I declared to God
**"I WANT YOU
TO COME INTO
MY LIFE!"**

Our time in the United States has not been without challenges. God blessed us with two beautiful children: Fernando Jr., and his brother Joshua. In late 2017 and early 2018, when Fernando Jr. was 16 years old (he is now 20), in less than a month he was involved in two accidents that resulted in brain damage. Even though he was still alive, many times this experience felt like we had completely lost our sweet son. It was such a difficult time that I decided to temporarily leave the pastorate to take care of our family. Our son had been a Jiu

Jitsu champion, a brilliant pianist, and an excellent student with a very helpful, good heart. Now he continues to battle with an unknown psychosis, but we know that God was and is in control (Jeremiah 29:11).

We also knew we were called to serve Him and believed this difficult period was only a detour from ministry. In 2020, while serving as a staff member at The Good Shepard Church in New Orleans, I enrolled in New Orleans Baptist Seminary to pursue a Master of Theological Studies. In 2022, we learned about Dawson's Hispanic Church Planting Residency Program. After completing the application process and passing the North American Mission Board's church planter assessment, we were confirmed to be Dawson's third church planting resident.

We are looking forward to learning from Pastor Joshua del Risco, the Director of the Residency Program, and we are excited about our upcoming move to Albertville and our partnership with First Baptist Church. We are honored to be a part of what God has been doing through Dawson's Hispanic Ministries for many years. We are excited for the opportunities we will have to share the Gospel as God opens doors for us in Albertville!






GRACE KLEIN COMMUNITY

A Little Gift From God

By **Laura Pickens**

 **GRACE KLEIN** <COMMUNITY> is an educational and charitable 501(C)(3) nonprofit dedicated to providing relief to the poor, disadvantaged, and underprivileged. Located right here in Birmingham, Grace Klein Community was founded in 2010 by Jenny and Jason Waltman. Grace Klein Community has provided services for 14 years and, in 2023, reached 36 of the 67 Alabama counties.

I am honored to serve as one of Grace Klein Community's board members and also to share some of my experiences with my Dawson family. My husband, Jim, and I first learned of Grace Klein Community in 2013 through the Waltmans' for-profit company, Grace Klein Construction, when we had hired them to do some updates on our home. One of the employees told us about the nonprofit and talked about how Jenny and Jason were the "real deal" in that they love Jesus and always encourage others to join in the efforts to help our neighbors.

Wondering about the name Grace Klein? It means "little gift from God." By giving people who are struggling some tangible help, it is their desire to point them to the biggest gift: Jesus.

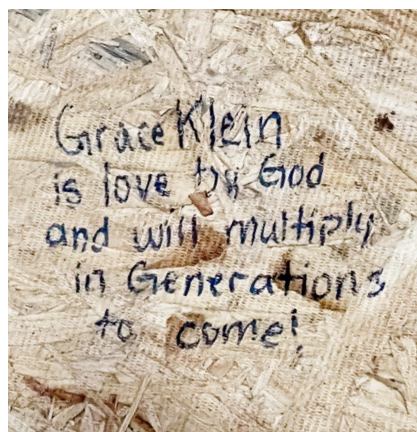
Prior to COVID, people in need of food were able to go to the Grace Klein office on Old Rocky Ridge Road in Hoover, but the process changed with the onset of the pandemic. New procedures took shape quickly and Liberty Church Birmingham located off of Old Rocky Ridge Road, graciously allowed Grace Klein Community to use their facility to begin a drive through program.

As each of our community friends drove through the line, boxes of food were loaded into their trunk while our volunteers prayed with and encouraged them. That program still serves the community today and is open Mondays through Thursdays from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. and is available for anyone in need.



Grace Klein also supports other drive-throughs in the state, including Wylam, Calera, Harpersville, and Alabaster. They also hold monthly events at the Jefferson County Family Court and Bessemer Court House.

Rescuing and distributing food is a huge part of the ministry of Grace Klein, but there is so much more. They distribute diapers and wipes to help support single mothers (currently more than 100 families monthly). The Grace Klein Garden Club help facilitate and manage community gardens. They gave away school supplies to 367 children this past year, and they also house a free "give and take" room for clothing and household goods. The "We Sew Love" sewing groups make clothing for our friends in need and for children in other countries. (Dawson members are very involved with this group.) In 2023, Grace Klein gave Christmas support to more than 1000 children.



For the past three years, the "Grace Klein Community Chef Club" has prepared thousands of small frozen meals from donated non-perishable food, which is given to people in crisis, such as a hospitalization or illness or death of a family member. This is a particular focus for Jim and me.

Jim and I also serve as food rescue volunteers. As "Food Rescue Heroes," we pick up food from 373 area food donor partners such as grocery stores, schools, restaurants, and caterers, and bring it to Grace Klein to be distributed. This is food that would have otherwise

been discarded. Some of this food may be near, or even at, the "Best By" date, but is still good food. In 2022, Grace Klein rescued 2 million pounds of food. In 2023, the total food rescued was more than 2.7 million pounds! When we do receive food that is not good for human consumption, we give it to farmers whose animals love it!



Some volunteers also pick up empty boxes from Chick-Fil-A, which are used as the food boxes at the drive-throughs. In addition to providing food at six drive-through sites, we supply food to our non-profit partners who pick up regularly at our office. We currently have 228 partners who receive food to distribute in their own communities. These partnerships have allowed us to provide food to more than 448,000 unique people!

Last summer, I went with a team to Kwathu Children's Home in Zambia, one of Grace Klein Community's global partners. Our team held nightly worship and praise times with the teenagers, reached out to the women in that community with washable sanitary supplies, prayed with the elderly in a very poor town, and helped on Kwathu's farm. I took a doll with me that was made by Dawson women and used it to tell the Gospel story to the children. Grace Klein also collects gently used shoes of all kinds and partners with Funds2Org to help fund the Kwathu school.

Jim worked in the trucking industry before retirement and is a handyman. These skill sets are helpful at Grace Klein Community. He has built bunk beds for a community home, built a steel handrail for an office, developed a pre-trip inspection sheet for the vehicles' drivers, procured some vehicles, set up a vehicle maintenance schedule, and he troubleshoots when needed. Even in retirement, he stays extremely busy!

Why do Jim and I love Grace Klein Community? We love to serve Christ by serving others, as He taught us. Jim and I have seen miracles. We really enjoy serving together. We also can choose to volunteer at times and places that work for us. We love the relationships we have developed. We get to mentor young people and learn from the aged. We are needed, appreciated, and loved. We are doing this with thankful hearts and hope to serve as long as we are able.

There is certainly more that could be detailed here, but if you would like further information, you can learn more and contact me via dawsonchurch.org/serve.

It is our prayer that you have been blessed to know more about Grace Klein Community and will share this knowledge with someone who could be blessed by it. You can also be blessed yourselves by serving with us and becoming the hands and feet of Christ throughout our city and beyond.

To His Glory!



Laura Pickens and her husband, Jim, joined Dawson in 2007. She has worked as a sales administrator for a chemical distributor while Jim is a retired COO from J&M Tank Lines. They have four children and five grandchildren.



SERVE JESUS BY SERVING OTHERS. VOLUNTEER AS AN INDIVIDUAL, COUPLE, FAMILY, OR GROUP.

How can you help? Here is a partial list:

- Be a Food Rescue Hero, it's fun! Choose from the available pickups; we have them every day from 6:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m. Just go to app.foodrescue.us to sign up.
- Help at our drive-throughs. Put together boxes, fill the boxes with food, take the boxes to the cars, pray with the recipients.
- We Sew Love: You can sew if that is your skill set or you can cut out patterns, iron, or organize.
- Help clean our spaces: the drive-through, the offices where we take in the food and send it out.
- At our community homes: clean, rake leaves, pull weeds, paint, and much more!
- Computer/Administration help is always needed.
- Write thank you cards.
- Make encouraging cards with Bible verses.
- Help with incoming donations; they need to be carried in, weighed, reported, and stored.
- Help load outgoing food for the nonprofit partners who pick up at our office.
- Join the GKC Chef Club and make frozen meals.
- Diaper and Wipe distribution to moms.
- HUGE NEED: Pick up food from GKC and deliver to non-driving individuals who are in great need.
- Can you drive one of the GKC trucks or vans to pick up food and take it to the drive-throughs?
- Get to know the staff and volunteers and pray with them, encourage them.
- Hold a shoe drive or a food drive; GKC will provide a bin for collections.

To volunteer, visit gracekleincommunity.com/volunteer or email to Carla at Carla@gracekleincommunity.com.

WHY WE SUPPORT SHORT-TERM missions



By **Kyle Bailey**
Associate Minister of Missions

Short-term Missions, as we do it now, is a relatively new phenomenon. In the 1990s, there was a boom in churches sending mission teams to Latin America. Then, as air travel became cheaper with more options, teams started going farther and farther, and the world, for many churches, became smaller and more connected. However, with the rise of short-term missions, there were also problems. Many people have rightly criticized this movement and pointed out the unintended consequences of these good works. There are clear examples of when this kind of helping has hurt communities and caused damage to the work of the Gospel.

Some critics have gone as far as to say that churches should not send these groups at all. They view it as wasteful spending that could be better used to fund national ministries. With all of the potential pitfalls of short-term missions, we must ask: Why do we still do short-term missions? At Dawson, we invest significant financial resources to send our people to serve around the world. We view it as a stewardship responsibility to look at the cost/benefit analysis. Is it worth the cost and time? After helping to lead short-term missions for almost three decades, I can confidently say the answer is, YES!

It is worth it. Here are four of many reasons why I believe we must send short-term teams:

1. First, the Bible clearly calls us to make disciples in all the world.

Acts 1:8 records the words of Jesus, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (ESV) This is not a sequential calling. We are called to our neighborhoods and to the outer reaches of the world—at the same time. We must go places where people do not yet know Jesus and share the Good News of His life, death, and resurrection.

2. Second, God's word describes the Church as One Body.

The Church here in America is just one small part. Short-term missions allow us to see and know the other parts of the Body of Christ. It helps to understand how to best pray for our brothers and sisters around the world. We also learn from Christians with a different and needed perspective on what it means to follow Christ.

3. Third, we go to support mission partners.

Oftentimes, missionaries are the most isolated workers in Christendom. Though their service

is rewarding, they are away from their friends and family and have limited opportunities for fellowship. When done well, our visits can provide needed encouragement and refreshing.

4. Fourth, we go because God's uses it as a tool for our own growth as Christians.

I have seen it over and over again—when we go outside of our comfort zone to serve, God stretches us and teaches us things we could never have learned at home. God also uses the stories of serving on short-term mission projects and stories of how the Spirit is moving around the world to encourage those who stayed behind and prayed and who supported these projects in other ways.

As a church, we are committed to mobilizing our people and resources to love our neighbors and reach the lost. We invite you to pray and consider if God is calling you to serve on a Dawson short-term mission project in 2024.



Kyle Bailey is Dawson's Associate Minister of Missions. Originally From Marietta, GA, Kyle graduated from Beeson Divinity School in 2013 with a Master of Divinity. Kyle and his wife Ali served primarily with mission partners in South Asia and Latin America. They have two children, Thomas and Claire, and a Goldendoodle, Gus.



DAWSON | 2024 MISSION PROJECTS

SOUTHEAST ASIA

EDUCATION SUPPORT PROJECT

Estimated Cost: \$1,900*
Dates: March 8-16
Leader: Belinda Stroud
Type of Ministry: Teaching, Children's Ministry, Cross-Cultural Worker Support
Participant Profiles: Adults, College Students

LAREDO, TX

FAMILY MISSION TRIP

Estimated Cost: \$750*
Dates: March 23-29
Leader: Bryan Howard
Type of Ministry: Service, Community Outreach, VBS
Participant Profiles: Adults, Families, Students
(Per Send Relief, the minimum age for volunteers is 12.)

EURASIA

MINISTRY SUPPORT TEAM

Estimated Cost: \$1,900*
Dates: April 6-13
Contact: Kyle Bailey
Type of Ministry: Children's Ministry, Cross-Cultural Worker Support
Participant Profiles: Adults

GUATEMALA

MEDICAL MISSION PROJECT

Estimated Cost: \$1,000*
Dates: April 13-19
Leader: Dr. Randy Stewart
Type of Ministry: Medical Outreach
Participant Profiles: Medical Professionals, Adults, College Students

EURASIA

COLLEGE MINISTRY TEAM

Estimated Cost: \$1,900*
Dates: April 28-May 8
Leader: Cole Griffith
Type of Ministry: Outreach, Prayer, Evangelism
Participant Profiles: College Students, Young Adults

WALES

WELSH PRAYER/MISSIONAL ENGAGEMENT PROJECT

Estimated Cost: \$1,700*
Dates: June 9-17
Contact: Kyle Bailey
Type of Ministry: Outreach, Evangelism
Participant Profiles: College Students, Young Adults, Adults

COLORADO

SPORTS CAMP OUTREACH

Estimated Cost: \$975*
Dates: July 7-14
Leader: Andy Cartee
Type of Ministry: Sports Camp, Community Outreach
Participant Profiles: Families, Adults, Students

HONDURAS

FAMILY MISSION PROJECT

Estimated Cost: \$1,000*
Dates: July 20-26
Leader: Reyna Craft
Type of Ministry: Children's Ministry, Community Outreach
Participant Profiles: Families, Adults, Students

CAMBRIDGE

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT OUTREACH

Estimated Cost: \$1,500*
Dates: July 28-August 11
Contact: Kyle Bailey
Type of Ministry: International Student Outreach
Participant Profiles: College Students, Young Adults

UGANDA

MEDICAL MISSION TRIP

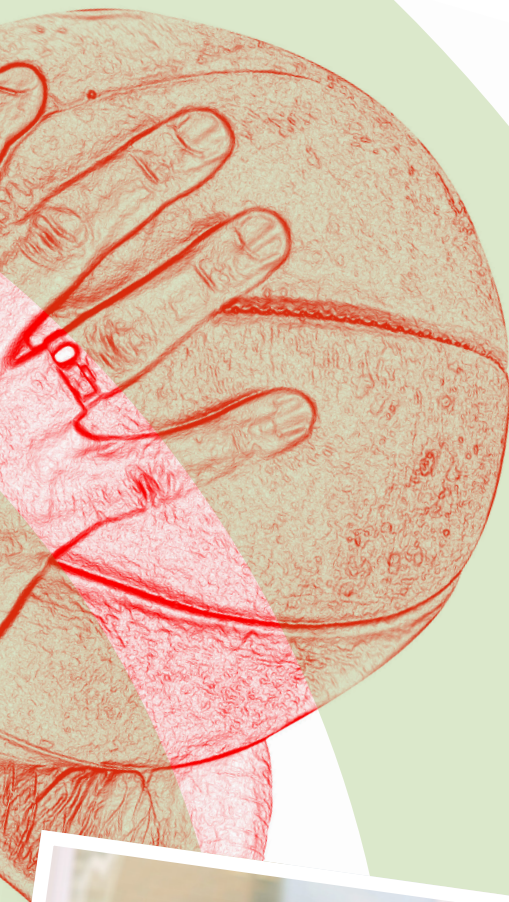
Estimated Cost: \$2,500
Dates: August 30-September 10
Leader: Debbie Moss
Type of Ministry: Medical, Refugee Relief
Participant Profiles: Medical Professionals, Adults

*Note: Through the generosity of Dawson members, the per participant cost for 2024 mission projects is substantially discounted. Additional scholarship funds are available as needed.

REGGIE, SET, GO!

By Reggie Hatcher | Associate Minister of Recreation

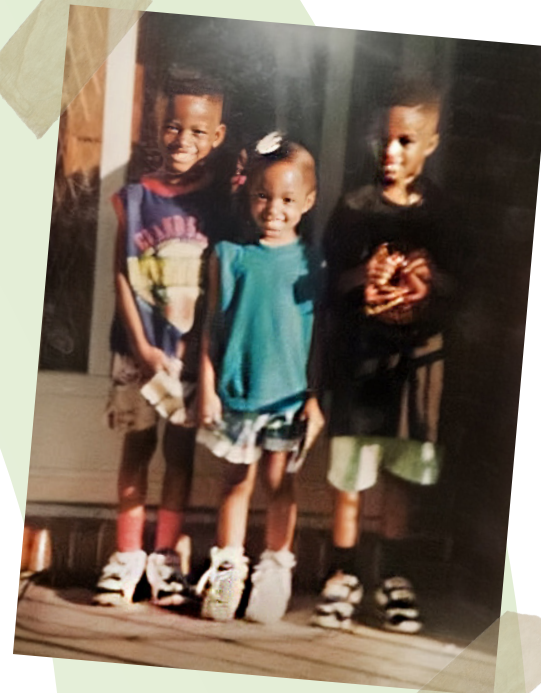




I was born and raised in Birmingham, AL, not only to new parents, but also to newlyweds who happened to be brand new believers in Jesus. I cannot even begin to imagine what it must've been like for my parents to be that young and navigating a tremendous amount of change. As I have gotten older and learned more about my family history, I know that navigating that amount of change with no one to show you godly and healthy ways of doing so made it even more challenging. Mom and Dad wanted a new life, to start off on a different and more secure footing. For them, that was beginning a relationship with Jesus, which meant that the foundation of their new family would be one built on THE Solid Rock.



Reggie with his wife Sarah, and daughters Isla and Hazel.



Reggie (on right) at 8 years old, with his younger siblings, Darius and Shay, in 1997.

We moved a good bit, all around Birmingham, during my childhood. I accepted Christ into my life when I was six or seven. I remember the day I told my mom about my decision like it was yesterday. We were living in a house in the West End neighborhood of Birmingham. I remember us standing in the kitchen right in front of the sink. Surrounded by white walls and brown cabinets, I remember the view outside of the window that day. My decision that day was every bit as real as the God who had (and still is) pursued my heart and drew me to Himself.

What brought me to that moment of making the most important decision of my life you might ask? Let's rewind a little bit. At a young age, you could say that I saw more than I should have. From the beginning, my family struggled financially. My dad was the sole breadwinner, as my mom stayed home with three kids under the age of four once my sister was born. I was too young to understand the full extent of how hard things were, but I knew enough to know that we were struggling. I remember the toll it took on my parents, on their marriage, and even the way they parented us. The house we lived in was next door to a house whose inhabitants sold drugs. I distinctly remember seeing one of the guys who lived next door lying dead in the driveway beside ours. I must have been around eight years old at that time.

I was too young to understand the gravity of where we were living and the why and how we got there, but I was aware that this wasn't an ideal neighborhood to live and grow up in. Experiencing some of the things I experienced and seeing some of the things I saw, I didn't know how to process any of it. I felt enveloped by hopelessness and surrounded by darkness. I needed something to hold onto, an anchor that would not sway no matter where the ship of life took us. I found that in God. Putting my faith in Him didn't change my external circumstances magically, but it gave me a sense of peace I couldn't find anywhere else.

My parents were part of a church that my uncle pastored, and it seemed like we were always there. Looking back, I can see how steeped my family was in "prosperity gospel" theology and the significance that televangelists had made on our lives. As a family struggling financially, I understand now how easy it was to gravitate towards a false gospel that promised us things we didn't currently have, particularly financial wealth. What initially began as seeing Jesus as the ultimate source of hope and peace in the midst of difficulty, became seeing Jesus as the "golden ticket" to the life I wanted us all to have. Faith became transactional. There was very little, if any, acknowledgment of my own sinfulness and a need for a Savior to rescue me. Lacking godly discipleship, I drifted towards a false gospel that would begin to have deep implications in my life.

Families are complicated and messy because people are broken and sinful. I know that's not true of just my family but of every family that exists. The lives we live and the things we struggle with can often be traced, in one way or another, back to family. Through years of counseling and unpacking things from my own life and that of my family's, one thread I have seen consistently present itself is the lack of healthy and Gospel-centered discipleship in my family.

The Lord began planting seeds for recreation ministry.



Reggie celebrating his birthday with Shades Mountain Baptist Church Singles Life Group in 2014.

As I grew in my faith and recognized the heresy of the prosperity gospel, I also grew in resentment towards my family for not showing me what it looked like to live a life completely surrendered to God. But how can you offer something you've never had or seen modeled? I had never considered that trusting in the sovereignty of Christ would include my spiritual walk. That part of what Philippians 4:19 meant for my life was that God would meet my spiritual need of discipleship through the local church.

Part of the beauty of the local church is that God uses women and men to help meet the spiritual needs of His people through discipleship. I believe that God used the lack of discipleship from my own family to plant seeds for a call to ministry that would bear fruit later.

It wasn't until I joined Kingwood Church in Alabaster as a high schooler and began to be ministered to by my youth pastor that I experienced, for the first time in my life, Gospel-centered and intentional discipleship. This is when I really started to understand my sinful nature, and why I needed Jesus, and what a relationship with Jesus meant and truly looked like. It was also when the Lord began planting seeds in my heart



A few months after I joined the staff at Shades, I had an amazing opportunity to go on a sports mission trip to Zambia. We worked with a missionary whose basketball ministry was having a deep impact on the area, especially through basketball camps. We spent a week helping young boys and teenagers develop their basketball skills while also sharing the Gospel. Seeing the young men that I was discipling go on this mission trip and be able to share the Gospel through—their own stories—was one of the most deeply impactful experiences I have ever had.

for recreation ministry. I was an avid basketball player, and Kingwood had a gym that was largely unused. I wanted a way to engage friends who were far from God through playing basketball and sharing the Gospel. So Kingwood let me use the gym, and I invited guys I went to high school with and my coworkers from Chick-fil-A to start coming to play with me. With no formal training on how to build a basketball ministry, it ended up just being basketball for a while. But even though there was no Bible Study aspect, relationally it thrived and it gave me the opportunity to have many other conversations with guys about their faith. Eventually this gathering of guys grew to over 80 of them coming each week to play! It was just incredible. For the first time I saw how basketball could draw people to the physical location of a church and the opportunities that it provided that church for ministry.

One thing that I will never forget is attending a particular prayer service at Kingwood. That night, the children's pastor had prophetically prayed over me that, "I would one day have the opportunity to use basketball to fish for men." I didn't understand it at that moment, but it's clear to me now that the Lord began His calling of me into ministry with that prayer.

About that same time, I was preparing to graduate from high school and had applied to only one school: UAB. I really didn't have any sort of vision for my life, much less an idea of what I wanted to study. I had applied for college only because that's what everyone else around me was doing. Even as I was still processing what that children's pastor had prayed over me, I had no clue what that could even look like. In hindsight, as I began my freshman year back in 2008, I was woefully unprepared for the rigors of college. Lacking direction for what I wanted to do with my life didn't help either. Due to a good bit of laziness and absolutely no drive or ambition, I ended up getting academically suspended from UAB two times. The second suspension was for an entire year, and it turned out to be the wake-up call that I needed.

I spent that whole year reevaluating my circumstances and assessing God's plan for my future. As that year came to a close, I felt the Lord leading me towards studying social work. I was excited after officially changing my major in the summer of 2012 and couldn't wait to start back that fall. However, I never could've foreseen the titanic-sized iceberg headed my way that would soon rock my world. Sadly, after a disagreement that could not be resolved, I got kicked out of my parents' house before school even started. I was

faced with either finding another place to live and figuring out a way to continue my education with less support, or dropping out of school completely to work full-time so that I could find a place to live on my own. Unfortunately, I had to choose the latter.

For the longest time, I found myself being embarrassed at sharing the fact that I was academically suspended from college. And not just once, but twice. I was even more embarrassed to tell others that I dropped out of college. But I came to realize that those things are part of my story, and if my story is to be told well, those painful, yet crucial details must be included. All of those details help paint the story that God has been creating since I was a kid. He uses the messiness of life and the unforeseen events that I may have found shameful as a way to display His power and glory in a way that I never could have done on my own. It is also a testament of the goodness of God and His love for us in how He never shames or embarrasses us, even after the worst sins or decisions of our lives.

After I dropped out of college and found a place to live, I also felt like it was time for me to own my faith and for it to become something I would be more intentional about. A deeply important part of that for me was finding a community of people my age who were also committed to following Jesus. People who were, in the words of Eugene Peterson, committed to "a long obedience in the same direction." Like the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19, one invitation changed everything.

I had met one of my best friends, Austin Johnson, at Kingwood Church. He was also a student at UAB. Austin invited me to come check out this singles Bible study at Shades Mountain Baptist Church. It was a mixed group of singles who were either in college about to graduate, in grad school, or had already graduated and were well into their careers.

I would one day have the opportunity to use basketball to fish for men.



Reggie and Austin.



I was surrounded by people who were already or training to be teachers, nurses, doctors, lawyers, financial professionals, and other respectable professions, and here I was just working at Chick-fil-A. I felt out of place in every way. I also felt one of the enemy's greatest tools of shame and embarrassment that I hadn't finished college and was working in fast food, and that, socioeconomically, I wasn't even close to these people. However, this group of people became my friends. They didn't care where I worked or that I hadn't finished college. They loved me the way Jesus taught us to love.

As I began to set roots down in this church with this group of friends, I met a staff member named Logan Creasy. Logan, who would later become one of my best friends, saw a call on my life to ministry and told me that he saw me as a leader in this group of singles. I just couldn't make sense of that! I asked him, "How can someone who doesn't have a college degree be qualified to lead people who have that and more?"

I wish I could say that immediately a light bulb went off and that the prayer that had been prayed over me years before made much more sense, or even that this encouragement from Logan became the catalyst that propelled me forward towards pursuing ministry. But it didn't, at first. I was still weighed down by what I hadn't accomplished, as well as the practicality of not knowing, considering my life circumstances at that time, what a way forward would look like. I was still working at Chick-fil-A and I had no plans of going back to college anytime soon because I didn't have the means or the margin. But thank God for people who are committed to the local church and to discipling and walking with people as they themselves walk with Him. Logan began spending time discipling me, holding me accountable, building me up, and encouraging me to boldly pursue the calling that God had given, despite what my present circumstances had looked like.

Logan wasn't the only person the Lord placed into my life. He sent several other guys into my life who showed me what it looked like to love Jesus, and to lead people and themselves well. They disciplined me and loved me in a way that I hadn't experienced. After about a year of being a part of the singles group at Shades, I officially became a member of the church. I also changed jobs and began working at a credit union. During this time, the Lord used an annual missions celebration at the church to really ignite a fire in me to pursue ministry. And after years of still wondering what that prayer from years ago would lead to, the Lord finally showed me what he had been preparing me for.

In the early part of 2018, I started working part-time at Shades in the Recreation Ministry, helping to launch and build out a new basketball ministry that had just started. Later that year, I began having conversations with the Recreation Minister about coming onto the staff full time. However, one of things the church wanted me to do was to go back and finish my undergraduate degree. The Lord had already been stirring a desire in my heart to do that, but I didn't think I would have the opportunity. For me, this is just a really beautiful part of my story. Here is something that I had been praying for, a chance to accomplish a real dream of mine in finishing my college education, and the Lord is provided it for me through a new ministry opportunity I didn't even see coming.



With Logan Creasy.

Logan saw a call on my life to ministry.

As I began to pursue re-enrolling back to UAB, there were some legitimate hurdles that existed. It had been 7 years since I was enrolled as a student at UAB. In the fall of 2012, when I dropped out of college to pursue full-time employment, I had already signed up for a full load of classes that semester. I naively believed that the professors would drop me from those classes since I wasn't showing up. Unfortunately, that's not what happened and I discovered that not only did I have four F's on my transcript, but I also owed UAB close to \$5K in tuition and fees! There was no way I could pay that money back any time soon. Even so, I continued with the appeal process, still believing that God was calling me into full-time ministry and trusting Him to do what I thought was impossible—but in the waiting, He was working. It took three months for me to hear back from UAB but not only had my appeal been approved and those four Fs had been removed, but the money I owed UAB was also completely wiped out!

The BIG day!



That paved the way for me to be readmitted to UAB, and it gave me an affirmation that God was indeed leading me toward full-time ministry. I began my journey towards graduation in the fall of 2019, which is the same year I became full-time at Shades leading the basketball ministry and some other aspects of Rec Ministry. I met my beautiful wife, Sarah, in May of 2020, and we were married in March of 2021. I officially graduated from UAB in April of 2022, and then by God's grace had the opportunity to join Dawson's staff at the end of February 2023. (When the Lord is directing your path, it's always an exciting journey!)

As you can tell, I've had many detours in my life. Some were certainly of my own doing and my own sinfulness. Some were just because life happened. I love this quote by Lillias Trotter when she says, "One learns as one goes on, not to fear the detours by which God leads on." With every detour I have ever been on I have learned to see how God used those to accomplish His purposes for me. Even the detours that have occurred because I have sinned against our holy God, yet over time, through repentance and turning back to Him and trusting Him with every part of my life (even the ugly parts), God has brought about healing and restoration and new dreams. More importantly, God has shown who He is and His heart for His people. Those detours have led me to where I am today and have led me to serve in the Recreation Ministry at Dawson. I wish I could fully convey how thrilled my family and I are to be serving you (and with you) and alongside such an incredible staff!

When I think about how discipleship has been a common theme in my life, I think of my own little family. I have been married to my amazing wife, Sarah, for almost 3 years now. We met and married during the pandemic. We had our firstborn, a baby girl named Isla, a couple of weeks after my graduation from UAB. We welcomed our second baby girl, Hazel, in mid-October of last year. Sarah is a nurse at Children's Hospital, so our family is like many others with both parents working outside the home. With our two little ones, we know how important it is that the two of us love, respect, and lean on each other as much as possible. God has given us such a gift, and we are so grateful! Most of all, we know the importance of intentionally making God the center of all we do. Without Him, everything else is worthless.

When I think of my growing family and how I am responsible for them, I am reminded of how God has placed this deep



One learns as one goes on, not to fear the detours by which God leads on.



Reggie with 5th graders at KidLife 2023.

Reggie with newborn Hazel, and Isla (inset).

desire in me to buck the trend of men in my family and to be a husband and father who is intentional about leading his family to Christ boldly and unashamedly. When I think of my wife, I think about how I want to love her the way Christ loves the Church and how I want to join in the work God is already doing to continuously form her each day into His image, not my own ideas of what that should look like. When I think of my daughters, I think of how I want them to grow into beautiful young women who are all-in on following Jesus as their Savior and how I want them to see that modeled by both of their parents.

And then there's me. What do I want discipleship to look like in my own life as I lead my family? Based on Deuteronomy 6:5-9,

I simply want to point them all back to Jesus in my everyday living. In the monotony and in the excitement. In the mountain highs and deep-sea lows. In what I prioritize, and what I say and do. By being faithful to everything He has called me to and by modeling for my family how to do the same.

May we all be found faithful in the amazing work that the Lord has called each of us to.



Reggie Hatcher serves as Dawson's Associate Minister of Recreation and lives in Homewood with his wife, Sarah, and daughters, Isla and Hazel. In his spare time, Reggie enjoys playing pickleball and spending time with his family. He is currently working on his Masters of Arts and Pastoral Ministry at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

2023/24 BETA INTERNS



Dawson's BETA Internship Program is a wonderful time of preparation and enrichment for our students seeking a life of service to God's Church and God's people. It's a time for each student to clarify his or her calling, gain practical experience, and participate in the work God is doing at Dawson and beyond. I'm incredibly grateful for each of these interns and the hard work they have contributed while at Dawson. I'm grateful for a church family that invests in the next generation of leaders called to do God's work around the world.

— **Cole Griffith**
College Minister



ANDREW IVESTER



ADA BURRIS



BLAIRE BOOZER



AVERY FLINT



CAROLINE MEYERS



CAROLINE SEELING



EMMY TANE



AUSTIN SANDERS



KATHERINE WILLIAMS



INTERN

ON MISSION

By **Blaire Boozer**

Missions is a concept I have been exposed to since I was a young girl. Growing up, my parents set an amazing example of what faithfulness looks like in a local body of believers. Every Sunday and Wednesday we were at church. One of my favorite parts of church was attending GAs (Girls in Action) on Wednesday nights. Not only did I get to spend time with my friends, but I also got to hear really cool stories from really cool people.

I vividly remember sitting at the feet of a woman from our church who had received a calling to be a missionary in China. She came to GAs with so many amazing stories and pictures. It was fascinating to me that she went to such a place just to talk about God. I soaked up every word she said with awe.

My first foreign mission trip was at the age of 10 through an organization called Family Legacy. My parents had heard about it through a childhood friend of my mom's. Family Legacy is an organization in Zambia, Africa. It has many programs that serve local Zambians by caring for their physical and spiritual well-being. The program that my family and I participated in is called Camp Life. Essentially, it is a VBS for Zambian children that is held around the compounds that surround Family Legacy. Each volunteer gets to spend a week as a leader for 10 children of varying ages doing all sorts of things.

I had the opportunity to lead my group of 7 and 8 year-old girls alongside two local Zambians. During this week, you are constantly playing with them, loving on them, and most importantly, sharing the Gospel with them. It was truly a transformative experience.

From the moment we arrived, it was easy to see that each of my girls had a joy that was indescribable. I was struck by the fact that they had almost nothing compared to me and yet they still showed gratitude—when I was often ungrateful. Because food was never promised, the children who came to Camp Life were probably eating their only meal of the day. This meal would consist of four pieces of bread and a smoothie because their empty stomachs couldn't handle much more.

One of the most vivid memories I have was when we revealed the gifts they would receive at the end of the week. The items were presented to the kids from smallest to largest, and the first item shown was a single Starburst candy. When the man on the stage held it up for everyone to see, the whole room burst with excitement. There was chanting and dancing and the biggest smiles! I couldn't fathom this much excitement for something I took for granted. Not only were the girls extremely joyful, but they also showed a great desire to know more about God. They were very receptive to what we shared during

Bible study. This fact alone has taught me so much about the kindness of God in revealing Himself to all people. Until this point, God had been confined to a box in my life. This box included church and camp. I would hear about missionaries telling people in foreign countries about God, but witnessing to others on the receiving end changed my perspective. I was able to see firsthand that there are people that Jesus loves who are not a part of my daily life, and that He uses people like me to tell them about His love for them.

Since that time, I have participated in two more mission trips through Family Legacy and multiple mission trips through the youth group in my home church. As I have gotten older, the Lord has continually taught me more about His faithfulness in providing a way for all people to have salvation through Jesus Christ and the need for those who don't know Jesus' name to hear it. He has impressed upon my heart the desire to serve Him in that way through my pursuit of a nursing degree.

Serving as a BETA Intern for Dawson's Missions Ministry has given me lots of opportunities to talk about missions, and also to serve others and share the Gospel through Kids Connection. If you are considering your first mission trip, I encourage you to take that first step. I promise that your life will be forever changed.



HELP IS ON THE WAY

By Justin Wallace

September was fleeing as the trees whispered their red and yellow secrets of the oncoming maverick named October. A young breeze darted through the parking lot of the Fort Williams Park in Cape Elizabeth, Maine. An incurably beautiful tree stood nearby the lot and beckoned people to leave their cars behind to see what treasure was waiting for them over the hill. Our small group wasted no time in answering the call. The crisp air invigorated us as we climbed the slope, our last effort before our awaited prize. We knew precisely what we would see after the crest; our own imaginations formed vivid images of the tranquil sea and the dreamy Portland Head Lighthouse. Finally, we arrived at the summit and quickly realized our prepared words of exclamation were feeble attempts to describe the sheer beauty before us. Our heavenly Artist gave us a glimpse of His magnitude, goodness, and beauty. All of His divine colors mixed and swirled across this earthly canvas. We paused in wonder and praise before resuming our journey to the sea, eager to greet our old friend called the Atlantic and to rest in its company. We filled our lungs with the vitalizing sea air and, in that moment, had nothing to do but smile. Yet within me stirred a sense of worthlessness. I looked at each of the members of the group and felt that they belonged here in Maine, and I was just a child tagging along to say “Yes, sir” and eat lobster.

Our small team of from Dawson (Abbey Plant, Dan Mullis, Drew Romanowski, John Woods, and myself) had been preparing for this trip for several months. Our task was to facilitate a Worship Arts Conference at Summit Church in Gorham, with whom Dawson has been partnering for several years through the **Go Love Tell** missions emphasis. The conference was for worship leaders in the area with a goal of sharing the

details of how Dawson intentionally prepares for worship from all aspects—simply the what, the why, and the how. Attendees came from Summit Church and First Baptist Church of Gorham and were a good mix of musicians and planners—both lay people and church staff. The five of us from Dawson each led one of the sessions, ranging from contemplative philosophy of worship to tangible application. We had carefully

planned our discussions leading up to the trip, praying that our efforts would edify our brothers and sisters in Maine.

Christianity isn't always warmly received up north. Our friends in Maine burn brightly for Christ, but must protect their flame from the cold wind of doubt given off from their surroundings.

Part of Dawson's **Go Love Tell** missions emphasis included efforts to strengthen churches like Summit Church. A group of Dawson members visited Gorham in 2017 to serve the community in a massive way through Chapel Choir. The pastor of Summit Church, Travis Bush, and his team saw a need in his community for playground equipment for students with special needs. Dawson worked alongside Summit volunteers to clear the land and erect the equipment. They also provided maintenance and care to landmarks in town.

A project of this scope should have taken weeks, but it was accomplished in one day, leaving town officials and the community awestruck. The biggest impact, however, was that a church would serve its community in a profound way. This eventful day was called “We Love Gorham” and provided favor for the church in that community that is still reverberating today.



Clockwise from left to right: Dan Mullis, Drew Romanowski, Justin Wallace, John Woods and Abbey Plant.

The Worship Leader's Conference opened on a Friday night with an intimate worship service, which was followed by a session entitled "Rooting Our Worship" led by John Woods, Dawson's Music & Worship Pastor. Before it began, we each introduced ourselves and stated what we hoped to receive from the conference. I told my name and my role within the church at Dawson and said that I was hoping to gain confidence from the examples of each of the leaders at the conference. After all, the sessions were being led humbly by our amazing team of worship pastors, the lead audio/visual engineer, and a vocalist extraordinaire/Coordinator for Samford's Center for Worship and Arts.

I was feeling out of place again, unsure of what I could offer that would be of any value. I'm just the drummer with unclean lips, singing along with everyone else in the congregation. But of one thing I am sure: I know how to



smile. I was determined to show love to our team and to our extended family in Maine, even if all I could do was say, "Yes, sir." and "Your food is great!"

It didn't take long for my expectation to be met. During John's session, he detailed the philosophy and theology of worship. I nodded in agreement as he listed verses about coming before God with our sin laid bare and having that sin and guilt removed by God—just like Isaiah experienced (Isaiah 6:5-7).

John asked a question that struck me: "What are some ways you have seen worship encourage the church?" I immediately thought of my friend, Michael, who works at Dawson and who encourages me every week by telling me that what I do is a blessing to him and so many others. I started to reflect on what gifts God has given me that I could use to encourage and serve the people at this conference. The gift of observation isn't something one would probably hear discussed in pulpits or



at lectures, but I am what some call a "people watcher" or more accurately, a "quiet observer." I tend to notice small things like how people fidget in social situations or if someone is sporting a new haircut. How could I even possibly begin to offer this seemingly useless ability in a meaningful way?

A few of the people from Maine mentioned a specific issue they had experienced regarding song selection for worship. I immediately noticed that the way they gingerly approached the topic seemed to be of greater weight than what was implied. I later heard them talk about the same topic with another group of people with the same mannerisms. I knew it was something beyond my experience to answer, but that it could be addressed by one of the other members of our team. We had a moment during one of the sessions that was parallel to the aforementioned issue, so I posed it as a question to be discussed. The participants were engaged and many wise words were shared that appeared to soothe the members who had the issue. This was a little moment that gave me a small boost of confidence in my purpose for this trip. I kept looking for ways to anticipate or learn the needs of our attendees to which I could appropriately give voice.

Herman Melville wrote, "meditation and water are wedded forever." When we stood atop the hill at the Portland Head Lighthouse and gazed at the glassy sea, I experienced a part of myself that clawed at my insides and tempted me to despair. I believed I had nothing to offer. What arrogance of my flesh, boasting in my sinfulness and doubt! The Living Waters flowing in Maine and Birmingham and throughout all of this canvas called Earth offer a better meditation. Christ is alive in me and what I have to offer is Christ.



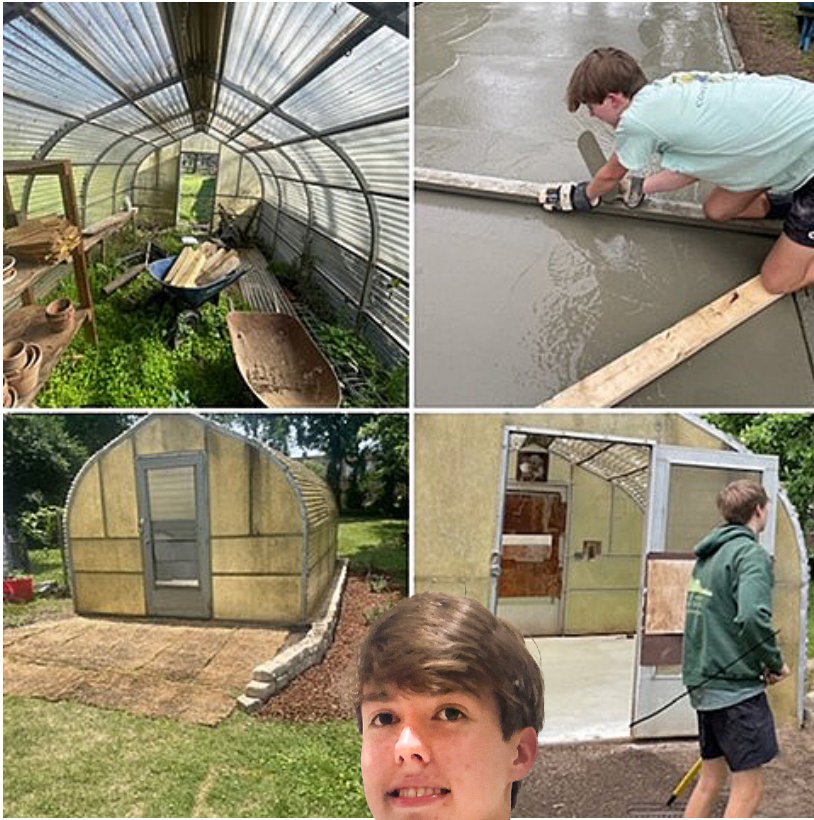
Justin Wallace is a musician and teacher from Birmingham. He serves as part of the instrumental music ministry, and studied percussion and music technology at UAB. He plays piano for classes with the Dance Foundation and teaches piano at Oak Mountain Presbyterian.



DAWSON EAGLE SCOUT

TROOP 83

Kane Hollifield



Kane Hollifield achieved the rank of Eagle Scout on June 14, 2023. Kane began his scouting career as a kindergartner. Since joining Troop 83, Kane has earned 22 merit badges and held numerous leadership positions, including Senior Patrol Leader, Librarian, Quartermaster, Chaplain's Aide, and Patrol Leader. He has earned the Triple Crown by participating in three high adventure trips through Scouting: Philmont, Northern Tier, and Sea Base.

For Kane's Eagle project, he improved a greenhouse for **GraceWorks Kids** in Woodlawn, AL. Kane raised funds for the project and completed it with the help of family and fellow Scouts in May 2023. For the project, they poured a concrete slab, replacing a dirt floor inside the greenhouse, and planted pollinator bushes for their garden.

GraceWorks Kids maintains a safe, educational, and spiritual space where kids can learn life lessons and job skills, discover personal talents, grow in spiritual insight, and explore nature's beauty. Unlike most summer programs, each inner-city youth is accepted into the program at no cost to them or their family. All clothing, tools, resources, food, transportation, event, and adventure fees are supplied by **GraceWorks Kids**.

Kane is a junior at Vestavia Hills High School this fall. His parents are Erin and Todd Hollifield and Kathryn Hollifield. Kane and his family attend All Saints Episcopal Church in Homewood.



LEADING FROM THE OVERFLOW

By **Jessica Orso**
Discipleship Ministry Associate

Come you weary heart now to Jesus
Come you anxious soul now and see
There is perfect love and comfort in your tears
Rest here in His wondrous peace

This is how the song, *The Goodness of Jesus*, began as Kara Fincher, Associate Minister to College Students, opened a packed Chapel of worshippers. The room represented all age group ministries at Dawson with a shared calling—to teach or lead in Sunday Life Groups.

As I looked around, I was overwhelmed with gratitude for the gifts represented in the room. Seasoned pillars of the church rubbing shoulders with newly called high schoolers with the same mission. And also that we had added an additional row of chairs at the last minute.

Emilia Posada graciously set the tone of the evening by reading our focus Scripture John 10:1-10 in Spanish, beautifully reminding us that though we may be divided amongst four services, two languages, and 115 different Life Groups on Sunday morning, we are still one church.

Attendees were guided through songs of worship music with Kara and John Woods, our Music & Worship Pastor, and with times of meditative prayer led by Kristen Torres, our Minister of Spiritual Development. It was also our first opportunity to hear a message from our new Discipleship Pastor, Jonathan Propes. Intentional pausing throughout the service brought leaders into journaling, some writing a few bullet points, some using the pause to really compose their thoughts.

Breakouts followed where each age group could meet with their age group ministers. Some age groups used their breakout time for answering questions that ironed out the year ahead. Some used the time to introduce new systems to better improve how Life Groups function.

Others focused more on the gift of *Deeper* by Dane Ortlund (which was given to all our leaders of all groups). These sessions provide an opportunity to reset and reconnect with other leaders, to feel equipped for the season ahead, and hear from others about what works best in their space.

The night ended with a fellowship dinner, and while the leaders from all the different age groups mingled and shared a family style meal together, I was struck by how big and how historic Dawson is. Families are represented here in this room. Generations are represented here in this room. But these people, these leaders, make our big old church feel small and fresh.

God uses these people as hands that love and guide our members. God uses these people as the voice that teaches His word and counsels His brokenhearted. Not a perfect one in the bunch, but God uses these people to care for His sheep. God is here, and His word is living and active in the hands of our leadership and church.

What a gift it is to have such an impressive group of leaders that are so talented in so many ways, and what a beautiful complement to our Discipleship Team.



Jessica Orso and her husband, John, have three children, Mena, Jake, and Evelyn. Jessica began volunteering with Dawson's Preschool Ministry in 2007. Since then, she has enjoyed working with the Day School, Dawson Kids, and the FRC. She now hopes to use her love of connecting family ministries as Discipleship Ministry Associate.



TEN MINUTE TALK

A Series of Rapid-Fire Questions With Dawson Staff Members

If you haven't met Kristen Torres, Dawson's Minister of Spiritual Development and Women's Ministry, please add that to your list as quickly as possible. Not only is Kristen one of the most creative people we know (she is an expert at poetry and prose), but she has recently released her new book, *Stroll With the Savior: An Invitation to Walk and Talk with God*, and has more books on the way. Kristen is the ultimate prayer warrior who is immensely devoted to her family and friends and gifted in so many ways. In her spare time, she and her husband, Angel, mentor the ladies of Samford's Women's Basketball Team. Read on to learn more!

Favorite time of day?

I love getting up super early in the morning. Once my feet have hit the floor I am good to go!

Favorite Scripture?

The most thought about/referenced scriptures: Philippians 4:4-7 and Lamentations 3:22-24

Favorite Book of the Bible?

Psalms

Best family board game?

We love to play password as a family, but we also do a lot of *Rummikub*, because that is a number game, and so that crosses any language barriers.

Favorite animal to see at a zoo?

I think I like the monkeys.

Do you have any pets?

A dog, his name is Leo.

Do you have a pet peeve?

Hmm, anyone undoing something I've worked hard to do (cleaning, organizing).

What do you do to relax?

Walk. Stretch. Hold my little dog.

What did you have for breakfast this morning?

I had monkey bread!

What is something that you are looking forward to? We are going to go to Ireland and Spain and France when Dante goes on the band trip. Homewood band is playing at the St. Patrick's Day parade, so we will start there. You can wish us luck!

Where did you go to college?

Berry College. And went to grad school at Samford.

What did you study?

Early childhood education. That's what I thought I would do forever. Loved it.

Would you travel to outer space?

Now? No. Would my husband? Yes.

How did you meet your husband?

We met at salsa dancing. It was a Tuesday night. He swept me off my feet on the dance floor.

What was it like to grow up at Dawson?

Family. It really was just all I knew. I really loved it. Dawson was like a second home to me. This church, meaning the people, raised me.

What's something important you've taught your son?

All things related to character. Being very "otherly." Many people who find out that he is an only child are shocked that he is an only child. He really is so great with people.

Favorite musical artist?

I don't necessarily have a favorite artist, but I have playlists that are based on the seasons.

Do you have an unpopular food opinion? I think what would surprise people is that I'm not a health food person. My favorite foods are Mexican, Italian, and hamburgers.

What are you reading lately?

The In-Between Place by Kat Armstrong.

How did you feel when you finished writing your book?

Ready to write another one.

How do you like to spend Christmas?

With my family, by a fireplace.

Did you play any high school sports?

Soccer.

Any secret talents?

I'm double jointed.

Favorite place to shop for clothing?

I don't know that I have a favorite place, but I like all things that don't require ironing, and I like flowy.

What's something you can't do?

I have a hard time leaving dirty dishes in the sink at night. Or walking out of the house without the bed being made.

How many states have you been to?

Not many. About 10 to 12.

Window or aisle seat?

Window.

Must-have travel item?

Comfortable shoes.

Favorite fruit?

Watermelon

Describe your style.

Eclectic.

What's something you can't live without?

Coffee in the morning.

What has surprised you about life lately? It shouldn't be surprising, but just the rear view mirror of how God continues to orchestrate every single detail, every moment of the day.

Popcorn or candy at the movies?

Popcorn and more than at the movies. That's like every night of my life.

Who was your celebrity crush when you were a teenager?

It would have probably been Ralph Macchio from *The Karate Kid*.

Last person you called?

My kindergarten teacher. She wanted one of my books, so I was just confirming when we would meet.

Where would you like to travel next?

I always want to go to the beach.

Chocolate or vanilla?

Chocolate.

Do you like surprises?

No.

Favorite dessert?

Smoky Mountain Fudge Milkshake from Jack's.

Who inspires you?

My parents, my husband, my son. People on staff here, our leaders, our volunteers. Just the way they all live so sacrificially and care deeply. Only God can love completely and unconditionally, but there are definitely people that He has placed in my life that I feel like do the same for me.

SONG | PRAYER | WORD

HE MUST
INCREASE

auxano

I MUST
DECREASE

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CHAPEL

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