

February 2022

# Together

AT DAWSON

20  
21

at a  
**GLANCE**

WALKING in  
**LOVE**

By LISA MCNAIR

New Podcast Launch!  
Everywhere You Are

College Ministry  
**VILLAGE**

Meet  
**AUBREY  
JOHNSTON**

Dawson's Associate  
Minister to Students

**40** YEARS  
OF CAMP  
DAWSON

# Life's Better Together

There's a Life Group for you!

PRESCHOOL  
KIDS  
STUDENTS  
COLLEGE  
YOUNG ADULTS  
ADULTS

# Together

AT DAWSON

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**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

From Your Pastor,

We are just a few weeks into 2022. The changing of the calendar year traditionally offers an invitation to a new beginning and a fresh start. For millions of people, the start of 2022 is a reminder that some things that we would rather leave behind have a pesky tendency to overstay their welcome. Like many other families, our family had to reschedule and/or cancel our Christmas and New Year's travel due to another Covid quarantine. Thankfully, the symptoms were mild but the disruption and disappointment were very real. While this was our experience, it was small in comparison, as many others came into 2022 still reeling from true loss and unrelenting grief.

We live in a culture that often overpromises quick and absolute solutions to every predicament that we might encounter. However, the last two years alone have made us even more aware that our quick, and seemingly complete, solutions are really just mirages. So much of what we experience in life is out of our control and beyond our ability to predict. And herein lies the hope we have every uncertain day, week, or year as a follower of Jesus.

In this edition of *Together at Dawson* magazine, we celebrate God's faithfulness in and through our church in 2021, and with great anticipation look forward to His leadership in 2022. Our hope in 2022 and always is:

...built on nothing less  
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,  
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.  
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;  
All other ground is sinking sand,  
All other ground is sinking sand.

This new year will bring unexpected joys, unique opportunities, and unforeseen trials and sorrows, but through it all you can stand firm and strong because you have a sure foundation that never cracks or gives way.

**May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. (Romans 15:13)**

Blessings,

Pastor David

# Life Groups Stories

By Kira Aaron

Oliver and I moved to Birmingham from Troy, Alabama, in the summer of 2013. With a toddler and preschooler at home and less than two months until the arrival of our third child, finding a church home where we would have a community in our new city became our top priority. We began visiting churches in the area but had not yet found the place for us. Then a sweet friend from our church in Troy connected me with Maile Gowing, who promptly invited us to visit Dawson.

On September 8, we visited the brand new Knight-Woodruff Life Group and met lots of new people. That night, our third baby was born. The class we had literally just attended that very morning set up a meal schedule for our family for the next six weeks! They not only welcomed us to Birmingham but embraced us wholeheartedly as part of their community. They graciously embodied the commandment to love God and love others, and their faithful acts of service were the Lord's prompting that Dawson was the place for our family to call home.

Being a part of a Life Group provided a built-in community of Bible-believing, Jesus-loving people who encouraged us in our marriage, parenting, careers, and knowledge of the Lord. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, "Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." The fellowship with a Life Group of our peers led to our increased engagement in church activities and involvement in service to our community.

When Brooke Gibson, Dawson's Minister to Preschoolers, asked us to teach a preschool class, we knew it was our turn to serve in the same way that we had been served by others since arriving here. Mrs. Brooke and her team provided everything we needed to lead preschoolers in an hour of fun, fellowship, and forging foundations in the Word of God. We served with a variety of people who became dear to us and showed us so much about how to love God and others.

There were college students who sacrificed sleeping in on Sunday mornings to spend time with 4-year-olds; Marilyn Henry and Katherine Newman faithfully taught and encouraged the children and us; and Tiffany Pierce and Mary Austin Jones kept the children laughing and learning with lots of motions, costumes, and excitement to each lesson. By participating in a Life Group as leaders, our focus was on what the children were learning, but we also learned so much ourselves from the Bible while preparing for each lesson.

Recently, Oliver and I went back to an adult Life Group class. Charlie and Beverly Douthit, Tom and Ginger Lewis, and Tim and Beth Kaiser lead our lively bunch of 30-40 somethings in a weekly study of Scripture. Studying the Bible with other believers always illuminates things I haven't noticed on my own. 1 John 1:3-4 says, "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete."

Just as promised, we leave our Life Group each week overflowing with joy because our fellowship with the Father is amplified by our fellowship with one another. Being active in a Life Group keeps us anchored in the Gospel, depending upon God in His unfathomable self sufficiency, and continually seeking after a closer walk with Him.

In the book *None Like Him*, author Jen Wilkin says, "God is able to bring eternal results from our time-bound efforts... This side of heaven, the only investments with eternal significance are people. Living this day well means prioritizing relationships."

From our perspective and firsthand experience, Life Groups are where relationships in the local church truly begin.



Clockwise from top left: Oliver, Kira, Elizabeth Anne (11), Charlie (9) and Lolly (8).



Kira Aaron is a 9th-grade English teacher at Vestavia Hills. A firm believer that people were made for relationships, she is an avid reader who loves exploring new places, cultures, and ideas through literature.



JANUARY 14-16: THE GOOD LIFE

"DNO was an incredibly impactful weekend that helped me change my outlook on pursuing others with Christ's love. It was so cool to see everyone come together and worship God alongside each other without any restraint or fear. My small group always had powerful conversations that took what the speaker taught to a deeper level. The late night activity for the high schoolers was a hoedown with comfort food from Cracker Barrel. The sermons probably had the greatest impact on me personally. Throughout the entire weekend, we were constantly reminded that eternal satisfaction only comes from pursuing God."

—Laura Matthews, 11th Grade

# A LOOK BACK AT 2021

 **1,417**  
Average Worship Attendance

 **1,339**  
Average Life Group Attendance

 **123**  
Participants in the Gospel & Racial Unity Class

 **140**  
Thursday Chapel Participants

 **111**  
College Students at Call Conference

 **97**  
Auxano Weekly Average Attendance

 **205**  
New Church Members

 **123** 1st Time Guests

 **52** Baptisms

 **220**  
DNow Students

**99**   
Breakaway Summer Camp Students

 **80**  
Kids in Attendance at Hispanic VBS

**78**   
Hispanic Retreat Attendants

 **5,604**  
DMA Lessons Taught

 **3,798**  
Wednesday Meals

 **833** Preschoolers & Kids at KidLife

 **371** KidLife Volunteers

 **36**  
KidLife Gospel Conversations

 **24**  
Family Dedications

 **1,899**  
New FRC Members

 **152**  
Ballet Students

 **218**  
Voices in the Choir Loft

 **2,390**  
Social Media Posts

 **116**  
New YouTube Channel Subscribers

 **583**  
Average Weekly Livestream Viewers

 **30**  
Women's Ministry Table Groups

 **350**  
Candlelight Leaders

# MISSIONS



**8**

Church Planting Partnerships



**419**

Operation Christmas Child Shoeboxes

**120**



Coy Backpacks Collected

**12**



GED Graduates

**78**



The Learning Center Students

**62**



Foster Children Served at Christmas

**5**



Families Stayed in the Missionary Houses  
Areas Served: Malaysia, Middle East, India, Egypt, and Southeast Asia



**1,452**  
Children Served

**500**  
Coats Purchased

**1,052**  
Pairs of Shoes Distributed

**400**  
Packages of School Supplies Given

# 2021 FINANCIAL INFORMATION



Tithes & Offerings

**\$10,774,169**



Expenses

**\$9,739,620**



Reserve Fund Balance

**\$1,161,086**



**25%**

Missions, Ministry & Music



**16%**

Operations



**18%**

Facilities Support



**41%**

Personnel

# WALKING IN LOVE

By Lisa McNair

LIFE,  
LOSS,  
AND  
LOVING  
BECAUSE  
JESUS  
SAID SO.



Denise McNair at home, age 11.

My oldest memory is that my sister Denise was killed in the bombing of our church by mean White people for no other reason than she was Black. As you can imagine, that was quite a heavy burden to carry as a little child. Not only was I hated by a whole group of people, but that kind of hate could get you killed.

Denise McNair was my older sister and the only child of my parents at that time. She was one of the 4 little girls killed in the infamous bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church on September 15, 1963. This tragic part of history could have started my life off in a very different way. My parents could have taught my younger sister and I to hate all White people; they could have taught us to be very bitter and angry. Thank God that is not who they were. My parents were very loving and God-fearing people who taught us to love everyone. They taught us not to judge people for how they looked or by any other superficial basis. Most of all, they taught us to love each person as Jesus Christ loved us.

Daddy did not fellowship on Sundays with Mamma at 16th Street Baptist Church. He was a member of St. Paul Lutheran Church near Titusville. It was a small congregation of no more than 300 people, and all of them were African American except for five. The pastor, Rev. Joseph Ellwanger, his wife, and their three children were all White. Knowing Rev. Ellwanger and his family gave me the wonderful opportunity to realize that all White folks did not hate me. Some of them loved us and wished us no ill will. Some even wanted to be our friends.

My Mamma, my younger sister, Kim, and I attended and were members of 16th Street Baptist Church until 1983. I later joined Sardis Baptist Church which also had a predominantly Black congregation. Around the year 2000, I began to search for a new church home and I visited a number of houses of worship in the Greater Birmingham area. My friends, the Brantleys, who had previously attended Sardis but were then Dawson members, invited me to be their guest one Sunday.

Dawson was not new to me. For many years, I had watched the service on TV on Sunday mornings while I got ready to attend my church. Daddy really enjoyed watching Dr. Gary Fenton preach, and also his predecessor, Dr. Edgar Arendall.

It was fun to share that spiritual time with Daddy. While we were children, Kim and I chose to fellowship mostly with Mamma at 16th Street instead of with Daddy at St. Paul. We always felt guilty for not going to church with him. Watching Dawson with Daddy felt like our special time of worship together. So, when the Brantleys invited me, I was very excited to actually be at the church I had viewed on TV for so many years. I had a wonderful time that day, and after the service, I even got to meet Dr. Fenton. He was so nice to me and he spoke fondly of my Daddy who he knew from the Rotary Club.

After that, I continued to visit Dawson but maintained my membership at Sardis. I attended Sardis on the 1st and 3rd Sundays because those were the days I sang in the choir, and the rest of the time I would attend Dawson. I even joined a Sunday School class at Dawson. It was a class for singles in my age group taught by Debbie Moss. Everyone I encountered was so nice to me and a lot of fun to be around. I also participated in many other activities there, including a women's lunch group that met once a month. I really enjoyed that.

Dawson was full of so many things to do. It gave me many interesting ways to fill my time as a single person. At this point in my life almost all of my friends were married and had children, and I had neither a husband nor children. Sometimes, it can be a very lonely existence when it seems like everyone around you is paired up, but I felt whole and fulfilled with all the activities and new friends that Dawson offered.

This visiting back and forth went on for quite some time—years in fact. I wanted to join Dawson, but I had reservations because I was Black and the vast majority of the members were White. But no one had ever made me feel unwanted. Sure, there was the occasional person who looked at me as if to say, 'What are you doing here?' or sometimes when walking in the hallway I would say, "Good Morning" and would receive no reply.

Most of all, they taught us to love each person as Jesus Christ loved us.





Lisa at her Sunday School Class Christmas social.

But those occasions were very rare. I also kept thinking about my family's history. We were part of Civil Rights history—a tragic part that happened right here in Birmingham. How was I going to join a large White church? What would people say? Would Black people think I had sold out? Would I be accepted there once I was a member? There were other Black people at Dawson but probably not more than 1% of us in attendance. And being that I was a tither, would it be wrong to tithe at a church that had so much in the way of resources, taking money away from a church in my own part of town that I knew needed it to help people who looked like me?

More questions came. Would I be okay joining a choir that most likely would NEVER sing the gospel music the way I was used to hearing and singing it at Sardis? What would my parents say? What would my sister say? We both had White friends, but this was going to really be different. No one in my immediate family had ever been a member of an all-White congregation. I knew the answers to all the questions. It didn't matter what anyone else would say because this was my walk with the Lord, not theirs. I had already been accepted by so many people at Dawson, and I wasn't even a member yet.

Being in the minority, though, was not a problem. I was often the minority in things or even the only Black person in the room for most of my life. And the issue with tithing was completely squashed because I knew for a fact that Dawson's mission work had helped a lot of people of color in Birmingham.

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I was still hesitant. This would be a big move. I prayed and asked God to please let me know what to do. And I asked Him for one of those clear signs that He had sent me before so that it would be unequivocal. I decided that I would not do anything different from what I was already doing until I received that sign.

His answer did not come right away. Months passed by, and I continued to attend both churches. Finally, one Sunday when I attended Dawson, I saw a lady who had attended Sardis with me. I didn't know that she had also been visiting Dawson for almost as long as I had. After the service, we walked together and talked about Dawson. She said that she really enjoyed it, but then went on to share all the reasons why she had not joined yet. Most of her reasons were my reasons, but they made no sense when she said them.

That was it! That was the sign I had been waiting for from God. As she was still talking, all I could hear in my head was, "I am going to join Dawson next Sunday!" And that is exactly what I did in September 2003. A year later, I joined the Sanctuary Choir, too. (I love the music we sing, but I still miss gospel music so I play it when I'm in the car.) Now, it has been almost 20 years since I first became a member at Dawson. I have made friends here that I will have for life. These people are family to me. We've been through everything together: weddings, births, and deaths.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said this about death in the eulogy he wrote for Denise's funeral: "Death comes to every individual. There is an amazing democracy about death. It is not aristocracy for some of the people, but a democracy for all of the people. Kings die and beggars die; rich men and poor men die; old people die, and young people die. Death comes to the innocent, and it comes to the guilty. Death is an irreducible common denominator of all men."

Dr. King was right. Death comes to everyone whether you are Black or White, but it seems to hurt even more when a young person dies prematurely. Sadly, racism, the thing that killed my sister when she was just 11 years old, has reared its ugly head again with a vengeance. It has been hard to watch. Over the years, my heart has been broken by the things I have heard people say and do, especially people who are a part of the body of Christ. One time, when my heart was particularly heavy, I took my questions straight to the Lord.

"Why do so many of my White brothers and sisters still hate us? Why do they still hold onto the sin of racism in their hearts? How can so many of them still say they love God who they have never seen and hate their brother and sister who they see every day?" This breaks my heart as an African American, but also as a fellow sister in Christ. Jesus has mandated that we love each other, no matter what.

At that moment, I believe God revealed something for me to really think about. Was it not true that many White people had learned how to be racist from their own families—parents, grandparents, aunts, or uncles? These were the same people who also taught them all other sorts of life lessons. And these were people whom they loved and respected. And, if that were the case, would it not be hard to go against their teaching or to even question their beliefs?

I thought about all of those things and then wondered how did that make it okay? Then I felt God telling me to put myself in their shoes. At first, I was like, "That doesn't have anything to do with me, Lord." (Jesus and I talk openly like that.) "I am not racist. I have never discriminated against anyone. My people are the ones who have been discriminated against." Then He brought to mind, ever so gently as He often does, someone close to home.

I began to think about my maternal grandmother, who we called Dear Dear. Dear Dear was a beautiful woman. She was very accomplished. She was born in 1906 and attended Alabama State, one of our historically Black College and Universities, where she earned her degree. This was extremely rare because during this time many of her contemporaries could only find work as maids for White families over the mountain. She and my granddaddy lived in a large two-story house near UAB. My granddaddy had his own dry cleaning store, Social Cleaners. They did very well for Black people during that time. Dear Dear believed in family, and if one person had something we all would get a piece of it. We supported each other in every way. We were family, and we were to love each other.

For much of the the time when my sister and I were in elementary and high school, Dear Dear came to live with us during the week to help Mamma take care of us. Daddy had been elected to the state legislature and had to be in Montgomery for at least 3 days a week when they were in session. Each day, after we left for school, Dear Dear would make up our beds and put our stuffed animals on top. Then she would put a pile of candy in front of them. When we got home, Dear Dear would say that the dolls had gone shopping and had brought us back some candy. We loved that! (We knew that she had purchased the candy, but we went along with it because it was so sweet.)



Lisa's grandmother, Dear Dear.

Dear Dear did so many wonderful things and she was always very kind and loving. But, for all of the good she did one bad thing. She hated White people to her core.

Our parents had placed Kim and me in a predominantly white private school, and Dear Dear hated that idea. I remember when I became a teenager, she made a point of telling me, "Don't you dare bring a White boy to this house." She didn't know that back then a White boy would never have asked a Black girl out anyway. Dear Dear was always polite in public, but boy, did she speak ill of White people at home.

Some might say that she had a right to feel that way. She grew up before our country was desegregated, and growing up in the Jim Crow South was

very difficult. Some might also say that her feelings were to be expected. Her first grandchild was killed at church for no reason. Only one person was convicted of her murder after 14 years, and the other killers weren't brought to justice until after Dear Dear had died.

Thinking about Dear Dear brought me back to the question I first asked God. Maybe those White brothers and sisters who still look at me differently are remembering the Dear Dears in their lives; relatives who meant so much to them, but on this one issue they were wrong. Maybe that relative is still living and it would be challenging to openly expressthat they no longer hate. Or just maybe they would be brave enough to break the cycle of hate like my parents did for my sister and me. Mamma and Daddy taught us to love one another with a different kind of love. The kind that Jesus teaches us about—loving our neighbor as ourselves.

I asked God to forgive Dear Dear, but I chose not to think like her. That would not please the Lord, nor would that bring harmony to the body of Christ. I love her for all the wonderful lessons she taught me, but on hating others because of their skin color, she was definitely wrong.

Next year, it will be 60 years since Denise and the other three girls were killed. That's more than enough time to end racism and get right with our neighbors. As followers of Jesus, we have to be the example of what's right in our city, our state, and our country. We, the body of Christ, really have to work on this and get this right. If we are not careful, we are going to miss a whole generation of young people who will not understand how we can love Christ and not love our neighbor. They may think Christianity isn't the way and that would be very sad. I know I cannot live without Christ. Life is hard and at the end of the day, He is all we have to lean on.



Lisa McNair travels the country sharing her story of loss, love and reconciliation through her company, Speak Lisa. In September, she will release her memoir *Dear Denise: Letters To The Sister I Never Knew*. Learn more at [www.SpeakLisa.com](http://www.SpeakLisa.com).



# Dawson's New Podcast: **EVERYWHERE YOU ARE**

By **RACHEL LANGSTON**  
SOCIAL MEDIA AND LIVESTREAM COORDINATOR

As we worked our way back to full, on-campus activities in 2021, Dawson's ministry teams were confronted with the reality of ministering in the midst of a pandemic that didn't seem to be going away any time soon. During that time, Kristen Torres, Dawson's Minister to Women, met and prayed with members of the Women's Ministry leadership teams to visualize what that might look like moving forward.

As the leaders continued to talk and brainstorm, Kristen knew she wanted to think of ways to develop a stronger online presence for women to provide a place to engage, equip, and encourage them to live freely in Christ. Before long, the idea of a podcast came up. In today's online culture, it's the perfect tool for meeting women of all ages, situations, and locations. From there, steps were taken to recruit a podcast production team—Becca Jenkins, Sarah Morlandt, and myself. As we began to pray and meet to discuss the content, goals emerged, as well as a podcast title, "Everywhere You Are."

### **GOAL 1:** Meet women where they are.

There are many women on Dawson's campus regularly, but the reality is that busy schedules keep us from seeing everyone every week. How could we communicate with people who may not attend activities on campus all the time? A podcast is accessible to everyone, can be produced inexpensively, and has the potential to reach anyone with access to the internet or a smartphone. Our first goal is to meet women where they currently are and be in a place where women of all stages of life can easily find us and become engaged.

### **GOAL 2:** Establish connections between women.

In a large church like Dawson, it can be harder to meet other people outside of your own small group of women or other people you already know. Our second goal is for the podcast to provide opportunities for women to meet other women who they might not normally encounter. Younger listeners will have the chance to hear about life experiences from older women and vice versa. Perhaps, hearing about a certain set of circumstances will be helpful to someone else in those same situations. Let's establish these new connections with each other and keep them going.

### **GOAL 3:** Tell stories of God using ordinary women.

Too often, women believe that their own experiences or individual spiritual journeys are not interesting or worth sharing with others. Actually, nothing could be further from the truth. Another important goal for the podcast is to tell as many stories as there are to tell. And these stories, told by ordinary women just like you and me, will highlight each person's relationship with Jesus. Is God still at work changing hearts and lives through extraordinary circumstances? Absolutely! And right here at Dawson!

### **GOAL 4:** Cultivate a sense of community.

At the very least, our podcast will serve to provide its listeners with a sense of belonging. Women who follow Jesus should be actively encouraging one another in the Lord, and the podcast will provide encouragement on-demand for all who listen.

It's one thing to have an idea, a name, and goals for a podcast but it's quite another to create an actual product. We started by establishing an episode template that includes an opening, an introduction, main content, and a closing. Each episode is approximately 30 to 40 minutes long and includes a conversation between two hosts and two or three guests. Conversations have already been recorded with pairs of women from Dawson's staff and several wives of staff members. Those episodes are available to listen to now. Each episode will close with a thought to ponder from that episode's conversation and a prayer, based on Colossians 3:15-17.

Going forward, guests for each new episode will include Dawson women who are willing to share gospel-centered stories and experiences. All of our interviews are conducted as round-table conversations and are based on a series of questions about how God is working in and through women throughout our community. New podcasts will be available each month on all major podcast platforms. We are excited about how God will use this new tool as we serve women everywhere they are.

If you have a gospel-centered story or experience, we would love to hear from you! For more information, please contact Kristen Torres at [ktorres@dawsonchurch.org](mailto:ktorres@dawsonchurch.org). Find our podcast here: <https://anchor.fm/dawson-women>.

TAKING THE MESSAGE  
OF BELIEVING AND BECOMING  
TO WOMEN ANYWHERE!



Rachel Langston serves as Dawson's Social Media and Livestream Coordinator. When she's not at work, she enjoys listening to true crime podcasts, traveling, and Mexican food. She and her husband, Kevin, have two children, Grant and Raines.



# My life

By Aubrey Johnston

Associate Minister to Students

# is not *my own.*

AS A TEENAGER, ABOVE MY BED HUNG A HANDMADE COLLAGE FULL OF MAGAZINE CLIPPINGS, PURPLE PAINT, AND A QUOTE BY ELEANOR ROOSEVELT THAT READ, "SINCE EVERYBODY IS AN INDIVIDUAL NOBODY CAN BE YOU. YOU ARE UNIQUE. YOUR LIFE IS YOUR OWN. YOU MOLD IT. YOU MAKE IT."

This saying gives perfect commentary on who I was as a young teenager; looking for identity in my uniqueness, while searching for what my purpose would be in life. And if you told teenage Aubrey, that 26-year-old Aubrey is a Minister to Students, she would laugh in your face. I don't think if I was "molding" my life on my own I would have chosen this specific path. But since giving my life to Jesus in the 5th grade, my life hasn't been my own. Praise the Lord, He is a much better author of my life.

I grew up in a suburb of Saint Louis, Missouri, in a home full of the love and grace of Jesus Christ. My parents, both believers, raised me and my two siblings in the church and were committed to teaching us Christian values. We started getting really involved in our home church when I entered the Student Ministry. The church culture I grew up in emphasized the grace and love of God and community but didn't encourage deep growth through the Bible and personal holiness. Thankfully, my parents sent me to Kanakuk Kamps, in Branson, MO, where I gave my life to Christ in the 5th grade and was later baptized in the lake at sixteen. Throughout the years, Kamp was a sweet place of growth for me as a teenager. It was a place of deep Christian community, something I didn't have a ton of at home.

When it came time to look for colleges, I felt that a smaller Christian college may strengthen me in my faith more than going to the state school where all of my high school friends were going. As I started to look, I realized that I couldn't make this type of decision without seeking the Lord's guidance. It would have been more comfortable to stay near my family and go to a school where I knew a ton of people, but I could tell that the Lord was steering me to seek something different.

Over the summer of 2012 my family took a trip to Hilton Head, requiring us to drive through Birmingham, creating the perfect time to stop for a tour at Samford University. From the moment I stepped on campus, I knew it was the place for me. Leaving Saint Louis was a step of boldness that only came from the confidence I had in God writing a better story for my life than I could. Upon entering college, I majored in Human Development and Family Education and later added a minor in Sociology and Religion. I knew the Lord gifted me with a love for people and a desire to serve families, but I really didn't know what that would mean as a career. Throughout my four years at Samford, the Lord refined me through many trials of differing sizes and scopes, but all teaching me to release control and allow Him to shape my story. Some of the most challenging struggles came from the distance between me and my family as they walked through a difficult season of addiction, depression, and sorrow. I wished so badly to be able to control my siblings' choices in the midst of their mental health crises, but I now see that the Lord was teaching me to turn to prayer and trust, instead of control and anxiety.

IF YOU TOLD  
TEENAGE AUBREY  
THAT 26-YEAR-  
OLD AUBREY IS  
A MINISTER TO  
STUDENTS, SHE  
WOULD LAUGH  
IN YOUR FACE.

One of the biggest blessings I experienced during my time in college was God's guidance in leading me to a ministry called **Delight**. In my sophomore year, I received a random call from a Tennessee number. The person asked me if I would consider writing a chapter in a college women's devotional book for a newer college ministry called Delight. Delight is a women's ministry focused on "inviting college women into Christ-centered community that fosters vulnerability and transforms stories." After writing the devotion on "identity," I grew interested in starting a Delight chapter on my own campus.



And, through a God-ordained chain of events, I was able to start a chapter at Samford. Over those next two and a half years I jumped into ministry head-first. I was leading a team of my peers (now some of my life-long best friends), discipling younger girls, and teaching regularly to a group of girls who gathered weekly at our chapter meetings. I learned quickly that the Lord had made me "to do" life with others, to walk alongside those who are struggling, and to encourage them in the Gospel. Without that random phone call, I am confident that I would not be doing full time ministry now.

As my senior year approached, I was wrestling between pursuing family counseling or getting my Master of Divinity. Honestly, I had no idea what to do other than to pray and trust that the Lord would make my path straight. After touring several graduate schools and seeking wisdom from my mentors,

## I LEARNED TO LOVE AND DISCIPLE YOUNG WOMEN WITH A PASSION.

I realized that the most important next step for me was to be rooted deeply in Scripture. The opportunity to grow in the knowledge of God's Word, to learn about the Church throughout the ages, and to study practical ministry seemed most available to me at Beeson Divinity School. Even though I knew I would be in the minority as a woman at Beeson seeking my M.Div., it seemed the Lord wasn't giving me another option. So, after wise counsel and words of affirmation, I entered seminary with no idea what the Lord would have in store.

Looking back at this decision, I see the Lord so clearly directing me in a path I wouldn't have chosen for myself. One that would be full of spiritual, emotional, relational, and academic hardships.

During my time at Beeson, I often felt the Lord refining me through fire. Not only was Beeson an incredibly intense academic environment, but it was also a very trying time spiritually. Learning the ancient languages, preaching in front of rooms of only male peers, leading other students who were more than 20 years my senior, definitely put me out of my comfort zone. But it also grew my personal relationship with the Lord.

While at Beeson, I worked as a Ministry Assistant at The Church at Brook Hills and then moved to Mountain Brook Community Church to serve as the College Associate. Through my time at these churches, I grew to understand what it looks like to do ministry well.

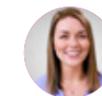
I learned to love and disciple young women with a passion that can only come from desiring others to know God's love and love Him in return. I soon began to see what it would mean to give my life to vocational ministry. When I look back, I can see the way the Lord was specifically preparing me for this job at Dawson.

So now I'm here at Dawson, serving as the Associate Minister to Students! Some of life's biggest blessings come simply from taking the next God-directed step, and this is one of those for me. Getting to know the students and love on the girls of this church, and being involved in the lives of the families are ways I see the Lord blessing me in the role already. I love working alongside our amazing DSM team. God is doing really cool things here in and through our students. It's a gift to serve the students in Birmingham and share the good news of Jesus Christ!

While it's obvious to see the Lord's molding of my life in my career calling and path, I also see it in my everyday life. He has gifted me with deep friendships in Birmingham over the past eight years. I am so thankful to live life alongside my two best friends from college as my roommates, as well as spend my weekends with our married friends and their new families.

The Lord is also teaching me to prioritize the slow moments with Him, which include lots of walking, hiking, backpacking, and trips home to stay at my family's cabin. He is teaching me to create balance in my daily routine, through things like making time to work out, cooking tasty food (when I'm not eating pizza at The LOFT), reading good books, and growing in my relationships with my boyfriend and friends. Each day is a chance to surrender to the Lord's molding and making of my life.

Philippians 1:6 reads: "...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." I hope my life is marked more by this passage of Scripture than by the quote hanging on my teenage wall. For while I know I am uniquely myself, made in God's image, my life is not my own. Rather, it is God's to mold and make. Praise the Lord that His ways are better than mine.



**Aubrey Johnston** is the Associate Minister to Students. She loves investing in and caring for the 6th-12th grade girls, while serving alongside the DSM team.



# HISPANIC CHURCH PLANTER RESIDENCY

By Ben Hale  
Evangelism & Missions Pastor

Because of Dawson's experience in supporting several church plants, it is time for us to take the next step as a sending church.

In 2015, Dawson undertook a bold, five-year missions emphasis called **Go Love Tell**, and by God's grace, it exceeded our expectations! Generous giving and careful stewardship provided Dawson's 2021 Mission Team with the opportunity to expand the impact of this successful program even further by intentionally directing remaining funds to three specific areas of ministry: revitalizing struggling churches, reaching unreached people groups, and planting second generation and ethnic churches. While ministry has already taken place in each of these areas, the largest ministry in terms of money and lasting impact will begin in early 2022 when Dawson will establish a Church Planting Residency Program. This program will train Hispanic church planters who will start eight new congregations in Alabama over the next four years.

Why is a church planting effort Dawson's next big missions endeavor? As with so many other things, the planning for our "next big thing" was delayed by the pandemic. During the months of waiting, one question was the primary motivation that eventually led us to church planting. We asked the question, "What can we do now, that will still be making a positive Kingdom impact on people in twenty-five years?" There were many good ways to use the resources with which God had blessed us, but the thought of new congregations, led by trained pastors, serving Alabama's growing Hispanic population seemed like something that Dawson was called and qualified to do. Although Dawson has supported several church plants in recent years, we have not been the sending church.

What exactly does a church planting residency entail? A church planting residency is an intensive 12 to 18 month period in which a potential church planter serves with a successful church plant and is mentored by an experienced planter to prepare for planting. It could be less than 12 months if the resident has previous planting experience, but the ideal length is 12 months. The goal of the residency is to equip the planter for greater success in planting his church by providing practical training and tools. Since this is our first experience with hosting a residency program and of being a sending church, the plans are to carefully evaluate the program as it progresses and make decisions about details of future residencies based on our experiences.

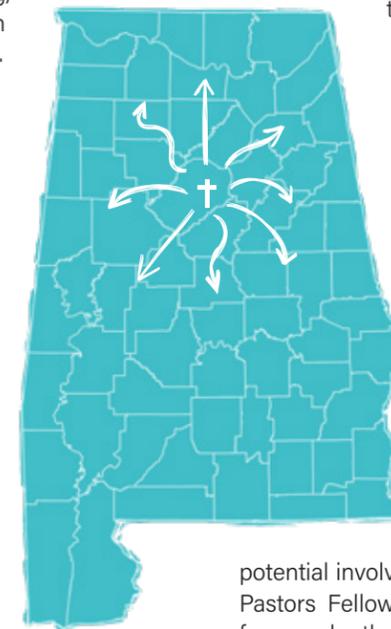
Because of our success of **Dawson's Hispanic Congregation** in planting a new Hispanic church in Fultondale, Iglesia Bautista Vida Nueva, we are particularly equipped to provide residency for Hispanic planters. Joshua del Risco, pastor at

Iglesia Bautista Vida Nueva, will be the primary mentor and trainer while continuing his pastoring responsibilities.

Brian Harper, the church planting catalyst at Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (ALSBOM), will help Dawson identify potential residents and conduct the NAMB assessment of them. Residents must pass that assessment before they start the residency. The planter's wife is included in that assessment to ensure her calling and commitment to planting. Each planter will be an independent contractor during their one year residency and for one year after that. At the end of that two-year period, the church plant will be incorporated and have their own 501(c)(3).

## SPRING 2022

The first resident will begin in the Spring of 2022. Mid-year, we will make detailed plans for the second resident, expecting their residency to begin in January 2023. After that time, we hope to have a new resident roughly every six months. We expect that the planter will launch the plant about 3 to 6 months after the end of his residency. During the residency, the resident will be regularly coached and evaluated to determine that he is a good candidate to plant a new church. We will also use available materials from NAMB, ALSBOM, and other successful sending churches as the basis for the content of our residency program.



The "Church Planting Primer" that was developed by Pillar Church in Dumbries, VA, will be studied in both Dawson's Hispanic Congregation and at Iglesia Vida Nueva in Fultondale to help their members understand church planting and consideration of their potential involvement. Additionally, we will create a Hispanic Pastors Fellowship to allow planters and pastors to learn from each other and support each other.

## HISPANIC CHURCH FOCUS

Why will Dawson's church planting effort be primarily focused on new Hispanic churches? There is no doubt that all types of churches need to be planted to reach all types of people and Dawson will continue to be diverse in our approach. However, we have concluded that our congregation is uniquely situated to plant Hispanic churches. In Henry Blackaby's book, *Experiencing God*, he encourages people seeking to determine God's will to simply look around and observe where God is already at work and then join Him.

This was the approach we used to explore various ways to plant churches. Dawson has a very long and positive 28-year relationship with our Hispanic congregation. The members



of this congregation represent more than 14 different nations of origin. Dawson's ministerial staff is blessed to include three ministers with a total of 77 years of Hispanic ministry experience. In addition, we also have four part-time interns working with our two Hispanic congregations. Our Hispanic congregation's success with the planting of Iglesia Bautista Vida Nueva in Fultondale has provided us with a model to use in future church plants. Joshua del Risco came to us with church planting experience with the North American Mission Board and two Baptist State Conventions. We see what God has been doing among us as an invitation to join Him.

## OUR PARTNERS

Who will partner with Dawson to establish and operate the residency program? Dawson's residency program will include partnerships with The Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions and eventually other Alabama Baptist churches located in the communities where the new Hispanic congregations will be planted. Each church plant will be unique, resulting in funding coming from multiple partners. Dawson will be the primary "sending" sponsor of each church plant, which includes a five-year financial commitment. Other churches in each community will provide a local support team for each new plant.

## PRAY FOR OUR PLANTERS

What can every Dawson member do to support our effort to start eight new Hispanic congregations in Alabama over the next four years? The answer is profound. We need you to intentionally pray for the following:

- Pray for the Hispanic church planters and their families that will be called and trained to plant new churches in Alabama.
- Pray for the pastors and church leaders of existing churches in the eight communities where these new congregations will be planted. Dawson will provide a trained church planter and financial resources, but these existing churches will need to be loving and supportive neighbors for their Hispanic brothers and sisters.
- Pray for the development of a Hispanic church planting network among Hispanic congregations that can provide culturally relevant support to each congregation.
- Pray for Dawson as we continue to seek to be found faithful in joining God in what He is already doing among us and around us.



**Ben Hale** is Dawson's Evangelism & Missions Pastor. He holds a Master of Divinity and a Doctorate of Ministry Degree with emphasis in International Student Ministry from Southwestern Seminary. Ben is married to Lindy and has three daughters: Abbie, Sara, and Grace.

# DAWSON'S NEWEST EAGLE SCOUTS



**RILEY HOWERTON**

**CORBIN MEHRER**



**Riley Howerton** achieved the rank of Eagle Scout at Dawson Church Troop 83 on January 13, 2022. Riley is the 4th generation of his family to receive this honor. Riley's leadership roles in the Troop included Senior Patrol Leader, Patrol Leader, Assistant Patrol Leader, Historian, and Scribe. He has earned 25 merit badges, along with the God and Life medal. He also earned his Arrow of Light rank as a Cub Scout with Pack 1 at Vestavia Methodist. One of his many favorite memories is being named Top Shot at Summer Camp at Camp Comer.

For his Eagle Scout project, Riley designed and built a 4 element low ropes course at Camp Dawson with the help of fellow scouts and adult leaders. The 4 challenges are a spider web, boson chairs, traverse line and a 7-foot team wall. Existing trees were used to help the course blend into the environment. Careful planning and drilling were done to protect the health of the trees. Yards of rope and wire cable were strung and clamped for three of the elements. Concrete was poured around timbers for the wall and spider web. This course can be used for kids camps, team building, and to help build confidence before taking on the camp's high ropes.

Riley is in his Senior year as a homeschooler and member of Essential Church School. He is an active member of Dawson's Chapel Choir and holds the officer position of Tenor Section Leader.

Riley's parents are Bill and Cindy Howerton. He and his family are active members at Dawson.

**Corbin Mehrer** achieved the rank of Eagle Scout on January 13, 2022. Corbin began his scouting career as a Kindergartener. He earned the Arrow of Light as a Cub Scout. Since joining Troop 83, Corbin has earned 31 merit badges, and held numerous leadership positions including, Chaplain, Librarian, and Historian. He is a member of the Order of the Arrow, and has earned the Triple Crown, by participating in three high adventure trips through Scouting.

For Corbin's Eagle Scout project, he installed six bat houses at Camp McDowell. He raised the funds for the project and built the bat houses using a construction plan from the International Bat Association. He, along with family and fellow scouts, cut the bat houses from plywood. Corbin then hosted an assembly day where nearly a dozen scouts, from multiple troops, assembled the houses. During National Bat Week, Corbin and a small group of volunteers installed the houses in different locations around Camp McDowell. Camp McDowell is home to several species of bat, including some that are protected. These houses will help maintain the population and hopefully increase the number of bats present at the camp.

Corbin is a Senior at Vestavia Hills High School. He is a member of the VEX World Championship qualifying Robotics team and looks forward to attending the University of Alabama in Huntsville this fall.

His parents are Erin and Todd Hollifield, and Michael Mehrer. Corbin and his family attend All Saints Episcopal Church.

# TOGETHER

Whether seasoned veterans or brand new to Dawson, our Sanctuary Choir members love serving (and singing) together.



SERVING IN THE CHOIR WAS NOT ABOUT MUSICAL PERFORMANCE, BUT A MINISTRY TO OTHERS.

I joined Dawson and the Sanctuary Choir in May of 1989, having just graduated from college and about to get married. Though I enjoyed singing, the choir really was about the social aspect for me at first. It gave me a place to “fit in,” and an activity that I could do with Julie, my new wife. Quickly, however, the choir became so much more than something to do on Wednesday nights and Sunday mornings.

I began to learn from Dr. Bob Hatfield to not just sing the hymns and anthems, but allow the Spirit to fill my heart and mind with these sacred words of our faith. I began to learn from the men and women of all ages around me in choir—watching how they strove to lead Christ-filled lives in all that they did. I also learned how serving in the choir was not about musical performance, but a ministry to others. Sanctuary Choir became a foundational source of my growth as a Christ follower, and has remained so throughout my adult life.

As I have gotten older, the privilege of serving our Family of Faith in worship on Sundays only gets sweeter! We never know how God is working in those moments in worship. Whether we sing hymns as a congregation and feel His presence moving among us, or even in those moments when things may feel a little flat to us, we can rest assured that even then He is moving!

To be given the opportunity to be used in the Sanctuary Choir as an instrument for His Glory, even with all of my imperfections, is humbling.



**Joe Raines** is the lucky husband of Julie for 32 years, and proud dad to two daughters, Evan and Laura Clayton. He is the Managing Director of UB Community Development and is an official for high school, USA Swimming, and NCAA swim meets.

# we sing!



It had been five long months of searching for a church. I visited churches with full bands, mosh pits, a single man with a guitar, and many more. I visited Baptist churches, non-denominational churches, and listened to any online service I found. None of them worked! My prayers had become desperate, and I didn't know if I would ever find a church I felt confident in. This was until one day I sat down in the back pew of Dawson at 9:47 a.m. and the choir began to sing. I don't remember the name of the song, but I do remember God using that choir to tell me it was worth the wait! I immediately picked up that little blue card and asked about joining the choir. The next week I had a folder waiting for me, and this was the beginning of my service at Dawson.

At the end of the summer I unexpectedly lost two of my grandparents. It was the worst pain I have ever experienced, and I didn't want to talk to God about it. The thing with singing in a choir is even when you don't want to talk to God, you have to! (And if you choose not to sing, John will know, and he won't be happy!) While singing and serving with your brothers and sisters in Christ, it's nearly impossible to not see God at work. Members of the church who were once strangers are now my great friends. I even made a special choir friend who reminded me of the Mawmaw I had lost.

God uses a group of regular people who just love Him and love to sing (you don't even have to be that good!) to minister to newcomers, engage others in worship, and to spread the good news of the Gospel! I am blessed and honored to serve as a part of this family and this ministry!



**Cailyn Thompson** is a member of Dawson Choir, Dawson Choir Social Committee, and Dawson Young Professionals Group. She loves singing praises and investing in her community through Dawson and her job at Sozo Trading Company.

I DO REMEMBER GOD USING THAT CHOIR TO TELL ME IT WAS WORTH THE WAIT!

## WELCOME TO

# VILLAGE

By Becca Jenkins

“It takes a village to raise a child.” As a mother of two young boys, Thomas and Will, I’m beginning to fully understand the truth of that idiom. Though I am an integral part of their lives, I’m not the only influence.

They will need the support of pastors, Life Group leaders, school teachers, soccer coaches, teammates, friends, grandparents, and the like to round out their development. I pray for the strength of this community, and I pray that they will be that strong community to someone else one day. But what about their college years? What about that awkward transition from childhood to adulthood? Blake, my husband and Dawson’s College Minister, and I have found that college students are often in danger of not having a “village.” If they had one in high school, they are usually forced to start anew in college. And it is *difficult*!

There are so many factors that can hinder that quest for godly community: busy schedules, cliques, distractions, church hopping, and the list goes on. But the necessity of Christian community is paramount in college as students are forming habits, identifying their beliefs, clarifying their values, and making monumental decisions. They need brothers and sisters in Christ to encourage them in truth, to hold them accountable, to pray for and with them, to enjoy fellowship and laughter, and to walk with them through the inevitable dark seasons of life.

This is what the Dawson College Ministry prays that Village will be. Villages consist of 15–20 college men and women who meet weekly in a host home to eat a meal and study the Bible together. For the overwhelmed freshman, for the transfer student struggling to get connected, for the upperclassman seeking wisdom for the next stage of life, we pray that Village will be a warm, welcoming environment where they can enjoy a home-cooked meal, time together in the Bible and in prayer, and deep fellowship.

## THE MEAL

Blake and I are firm believers that special things happen over the dinner table. From the very beginning of Village almost four years ago, we prioritized having a home-cooked



meal for students every week. Not only is it meaningful for students to eat something cooked especially for them, but it is reminiscent of home. We hope that it communicates our desire to be a spiritual family to them. As we gather to be nourished by a warm meal, it is a foretaste of the nourishment to come as we dive into the Bible together.

## THE WORD

Each year of Village we read through one of the four gospels together. Our hope is that, if a student comes to a Village all four years of their college career, they will graduate having read all four of the gospels. Students are typically invited to read the week’s selected Scripture portion before we meet so that those less likely to speak up in a group will have time to prepare and will feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts. As we read aloud together, we pause to ask questions, seek answers, and share what we believe God is teaching us through the Bible on a more personal level. We feast on His Word together.

## PRAYER

This looks a little differently each week. No matter the format, students have the opportunity to share prayer requests every Village meeting. Sometimes students share requests with the entire group and then a leader prays. Sometimes we break into small groups of 2–3 to pray for one another. Sometimes leaders guide students to personally pray through certain categories or topics, and sometimes we write down our prayer requests and exchange cards with another attendee as a reminder to continue praying for one another throughout the week. Students are pointed back to the power and sufficiency of God through His Word and through prayer, so that as they go forth from Village, they are strengthened for whatever lies ahead.



## FELLOWSHIP

Once a month, leaders designate their weekly Village meeting as a “hangout night.” The groups take this as an opportunity to enjoy God’s many other gifts together. During the fall months, there’s bound to be some pumpkin-carving or bonfires involved. When Christmas season rolls around, we bake cookies and drink hot chocolate. Our family loves hosting game nights—though we have to reel in our competitiveness sometimes. The laughter and restfulness of these nights are often a needed respite from a chaotic week for the students. And those who may be intimidated by “spiritual talk” lower their guard on these fellowship nights, paving the way for an openness to spiritual conversations in the long run.



*“I started attending Dawson and their college Life Group towards the end of my freshman year at Samford and instantly fell in love with the community there. One of the things that first stuck out to me was everyone’s warm personalities and openness to those who walked through the door and how they greeted everyone by name. It wasn’t until this year that I became more involved with the college community of Dawson by attending Auxano, signing up for a Village, and even Call Con. Signing up for a Village was intimidating at first due to not quite knowing anyone, but after walking into Cole and Sidney’s house the first night of Village, I knew I had made the right decision.*

*Everyone was so kind and welcoming and I quickly began to get the feeling that I had known these people for years. Flash forward to October and I had begun to form deeper bonds and friendships with the others of my Village and at Dawson. When it came time for Call Con, I had always believed that God existed but was dealing with doubt and the realization that even though I had grown up in a Christian home, I had not taken my faith as my own nor completely devoted my life to Jesus. It was on the second night of Call Con after a conversation with Blake and several of my friends that I had gone back to talk with Kara and made the decision to devote my life to Jesus. I am so incredibly thankful for everyone at Dawson who has helped me and will continue to help me through my walk with God.”*

## NOW MORE THAN EVER

Perhaps now more than ever, the hunger for face-to-face community feels especially strong. Following the social distancing rules of the early pandemic, we saw a 171% increase in Village attendance, and the numbers have continued to rise. Contrary to the belief that their generation only values the online social world, these students desire real, deep relationships. They value genuineness—like a sometimes-clean-but-usually-messy house, the chaos of getting my boys ready for bed, the bustle



This is clearly seen in the story of one of our students, Ansley Emerson, who writes:



Thomas and Will Jenkins.

of a busy kitchen—as opposed to the carefully curated Instagram profile. They want to be real. And really, don’t we all?

Thankfully, the Lord has provided the laborers for the field. Blake and I are so grateful to the College Ministry team and to other couples of our church who have graciously served by leading a Village. They truly embody 1 Thessalonians 2:8, being ready to share not only the gospel of God but to share themselves. I cannot overstate how much our leaders’ “sharing of themselves” has played a role in the growth of Village. To see leaders show up consistently opening their homes, providing food, reading the Bible, working through the tough texts, praying continually, following up on prayer requests, being vulnerable themselves—is attractive to students. They want more of it, and they want to share it with their friends.

## FULL CIRCLE

I’ll close with the story of Elayna Navas, a Samford student who joined the very first Village back in 2018. She joined as a freshman and has been a part of



**Becca Jenkins** is married to Blake Jenkins, Minister to College Students at Dawson. They have two sons, Thomas (5) and Will (1), and enjoy inviting college students into their home every week for good food and great conversation.

one ever since. Elayna will graduate this spring, and when asked to reflect on the past four years in Village, she wrote the following:

*“Village has made a huge impact on my college career. I started going to Village my freshman year (back when it was on Tuesday nights, before Auxano even existed) and I am now finishing my college experience attending Village at the same household. Before coming to Village, I had a difficult time finding a community of believers that I could be a part of, struggling with feeling unseen and unknown. I remember the Sunday that Blake talked about Village in Life Group, explaining what it was. I wanted to go but was super nervous not knowing anyone. However, when I walked into that home I was immediately welcomed and included in conversations. At Village, it’s like one big melting pot of people from different schools, backgrounds, and ages all coming together once a week to talk about God’s Word. Over a meal and a fun Question of the Week (my favorite was, “What’s your favorite smell?”), I have been able to talk with other college students about what we each glean from Scripture and the real things going on in our lives. These are people I might not have met were it not for Village. As my senior year is halfway done, I can honestly say that through Village I have been able to find a community that knows me, sees me, and loves me in a Christlike way, and I will forever be grateful for it.”*

# AUXANO

WORSHIP FOR  
YOUNG ADULTS  
+ COLLEGE

TUESDAYS  
7:00 P.M.  
CHAPEL

# 40 years



# of Camp Dawson

By Jacob Lindsey

IN JULY 1981, CAMP DAWSON WAS FOUNDED UNDER DR. EDGAR M. ARENDALL, FORMER SENIOR PASTOR AT DAWSON.



The camp was originally a horse farm owned by a young Irish couple. There were no trees on the property, just a large open piece of land that was fenced in. There was also a house with five-bedrooms, a pool, and a barn. Around 1975, the owner of the farm inherited a large amount of wealth and a castle in Ireland. Upon accepting the inheritance, the owner and his wife separated. She kept the farm while he moved to Ireland, but soon she decided to sell the property. Luckily, some of Dawson's church members knew that Dr. Arendall had always envisioned a large church camp where events and gatherings could take place.

Dr. Arendall, along with several deacons and their wives, traveled to Montevallo to view the camp after learning that it was for sale. After inspection, the group agreed that this would be a great location for Camp Dawson. On March 23, 1981, an anonymous donor gave a generous gift to purchase the property for Dawson. Years later, it was brought to light that the donors were Neal and Kitty Newell. They were also the ones who originally found the property and saw its future possibilities for ministry.

After acquiring the property, hard work began under the supervision of Bob Gladney, who then served on Dawson's staff as the Recreation Minister and then later as the Business Administrator. A team of volunteers from the church went to work planting 24,000 pine trees, renovating the house which would become the lodge, and turning rooms into bunkhouses. They added the big room, built the pavilion, filled in the original swimming pool to make a shallow one, and then dug a new deeper pool.

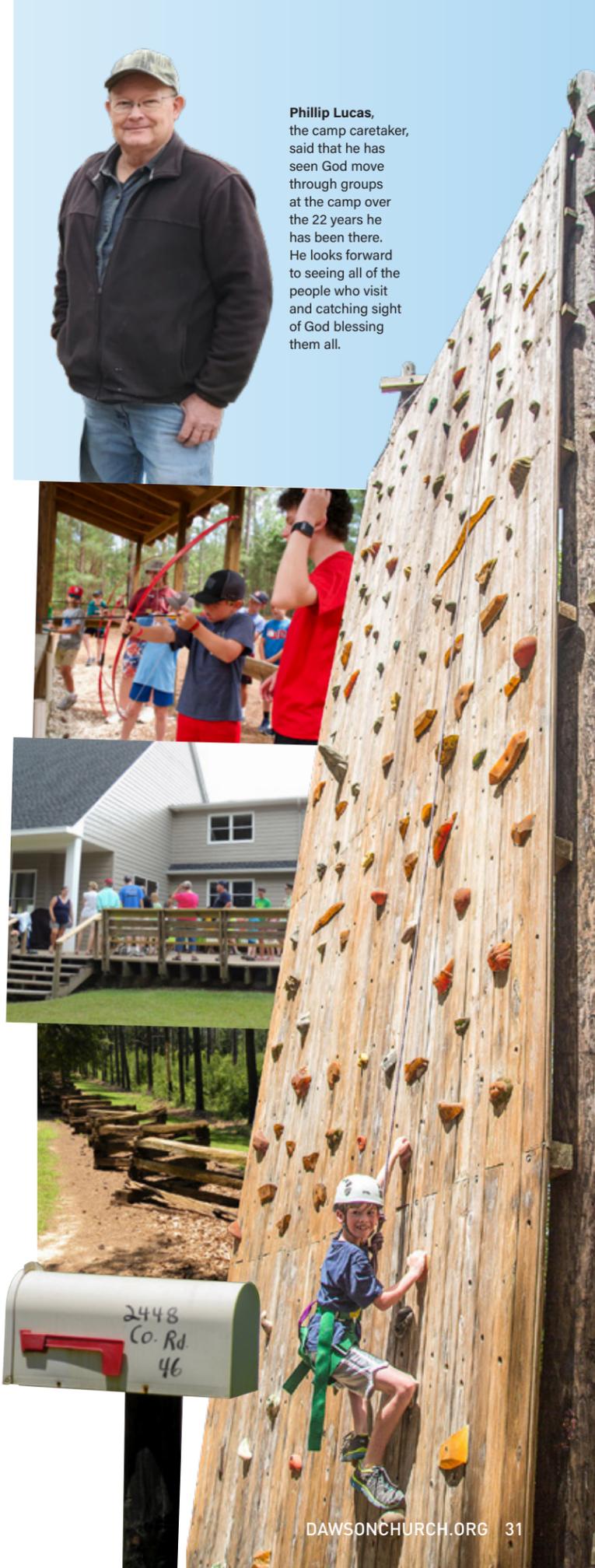
Since the original renovations, several repairs and updates have taken place at the camp. In 2018, Dawson member Grant Langston restored a nature trail at the camp for his Eagle Scout Project. The trail was paved with gravel, signs were placed with Scripture and directions, and benches were made and installed. The building of this trail has created a space for individuals to rest and to spiritually rejuvenate, and where Grant says, "You can be alone with your thoughts and God."

Since its founding, Camp Dawson has been used and loved by many families and groups, as well as countless outside organizations. Thousands of people of all ages have reaped the benefits from the camp over the past 40 years. From Life Groups and Ministry Retreats to Family Reunions, to summer Day Camps, Camp Dawson has been a place for life change and renewal. Today, Camp Dawson continues to be used as a ministry tool for the Dawson Family of Faith. Here's to another forty years!

If you would like to learn more about what Camp Dawson has to offer, please visit [dawsonchurch.org/campdawson](http://dawsonchurch.org/campdawson).



Jacob Lindsey is Dawson's Communications and Creative BETA Intern. He is currently enrolled at Samford University pursuing a degree in Journalism Mass Communication. Jacob has a passion for all things behind the camera and getting a complete story told through visual and written media.



Phillip Lucas, the camp caretaker, said that he has seen God move through groups at the camp over the 22 years he has been there. He looks forward to seeing all of the people who visit and catching sight of God blessing them all.



Randy Poe started at Dawson in June 2015 as the Associate Minister to Missions, where he served alongside Ben Hale and our **Go Love Tell** partners. Randy's background is in business, which provided the perfect skill set for him to transition to Business Administrator in 2019. Randy grew up as a missionary kid in Chile and is fluent in Spanish. He and his family are very involved at Dawson and also with Dawson's Hispanic Congregation. Learn more about Randy from the questions below.

# TEN MINUTE TALK

A Series of Rapid-Fire Questions With Dawson Staff Members

***Favorite outdoor activity?***

All I do outside is play with my kids and my dogs.

***What's your beverage of choice?***

Root beer.

***Do you have pets?***

2 dogs, Captain and Buddy.

***What's the first thing you do when you wake up?***

I pray and then I get ready for the day.

***Best vacation you've ever taken?***

Family vacation to Disney World.

***What's a surprise fact that we wouldn't know?***

I almost joined the FBI. I wanted to be an FBI agent. I went all the way through the process. I did the background check, I did the physical test, I did the Spanish language test, and I got to the final interview and withdrew my application to get married.

***Do you collect anything?***

Yes, antique circus items. Circus programs, circus toys. I also collect Bibles in other languages.

***What would you do with a free day all to yourself?***

I would go antique shopping.

***Favorite conspiracy theory?***

I believe there's a room with really wealthy people in it that make all the decisions that sway everything, regardless of politics. JFK...just saying.

***Favorite spot in Birmingham?***

The Alabama Theater.

***What song do you always have to sing along with?***

*Livin' On A Prayer* by Bon Jovi.

***What was your major in college?***

Business Administration.

***Are you a good dancer?***

Absolutely not. No rhythm. Zero.

***How did you meet your wife?***

In college at Samford. I saw her across the cafeteria floor. I talked to her friend to get information. Then I went to an outdoor recreation organization to hang out where she hung out until she noticed me.

***Who is your favorite Disney princess?***

Aurora from *Sleeping Beauty*. I like the idea that the prince will do anything to get to her, to rescue her.

***Did you participate in any clubs or sports in high school?***

Basketball. I played volleyball, I played softball, it was all sports, all the time, but basketball was the love.

***Would you go to the future if you could?***

Absolutely. I would hope to find that the Boston Celtics had become a basketball dynasty again. I'm a big Celtics fan.

***Hot dog or hamburger?***

Oh, hot dog.

***Popcorn or pretzels?***

Popcorn.

***What was your first job?***

Chick-fil-A.

***Watched any good TV shows lately?***

I watch *The Voice*.

***Who wins in a fight, Batman or Superman?***

Superman, all the way.

***What's something you do to embarrass your kids?***

I tell them how much Daddy loves them as they're getting out at carpool in the morning before school.

***Who is the last person you texted?***

Jordan, my 16-year-old daughter.

***Favorite dessert?***

German black forest cake.

***Favorite vegetable?***

All of them!

***What would you be doing if you weren't in ministry?***

I'd be in real estate investment, but that's kind of boring. I'd rather be playing professional basketball, but they haven't called me.

***Favorite author?***

Hmm...I read everything. If you saw my library you would understand why I can't just pick a favorite author but it would have to be Tom Clancy.

***What Olympic sport would you play?***

Basketball. There's definitely a consistent theme here.

***Sand or snow?***

Snow.

***What was your first concert?***

My first concert was Rod Stewart.

***Favorite musician or band?***

Bon Jovi.

***Have you ever met anyone famous?***

I sat on an airplane one time next to the Boston Celtics, but I didn't meet them.

***Favorite game for family game night?***

Monopoly. (Interviewer: Oh no, do you hate your family?) It's a game about business. Lots of life lessons there.

***Is cereal a soup?***

No. It's cold. (Interviewer: Gazpacho is cold, and that's a soup.) It's not what people should eat.

***What actor would you want to play you in a movie?***

Matthew McConaughey.

***What's the wallpaper on your phone?***

My family.



**June 6-9, 2022**

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