

# Together

MAY 2024  
AT DAWSON



Dawson Vacation Bible School, 1948

## WITNESSING GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

pg. 12

Why  
**WORSHIP**  
Is Our  
**RESPONSE**

DSM on  
Mission  
In  
*Laredo*

CONGRATS  
**2024**  
SENIORS

MEET  
**HANNAH  
ADAMS**  
Dawson's Associate  
Minister to Children



# Life's Better Together

THERE'S A LIFE GROUP FOR YOU!

PRESCHOOL | KIDS | STUDENTS | COLLEGE  
YOUNG ADULTS | ADULTS | SENIOR ADULTS

A close-up photograph of a hand pointing to a specific passage in an open Bible. The Bible is resting on a black lectern. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a church service with people in the pews.

[dawsonchurch.org/lifegroups](http://dawsonchurch.org/lifegroups)



# Together

AT DAWSON

## TABLE OF CONTENTS



- 2 From Pastor David
- 3 Life Group Stories  
**Lacey Middleton**
- 4 Worship Is Our Response  
**John Woods**
- 6 Get Ready For KidLife 2024
- 8 *Shine Our Lights* For KidLife  
**Kara Fincher**
- 10 Life Groups & Lifelong Friends  
**Meg Brown**

- 12 Witnessing God's Faithfulness  
**Jan Jones**
- 16 Congrats To Our 2024 Seniors!
- 18 On Mission On The Border  
**Laura Davis**
- 22 Four Friends For God  
**Dr. Randy Stewart**
- 24 Staying On My Toes  
**Hannah Adams**

- 28 Chasing The Eclipse  
**Keith Vinson**
- 32 Empty Spaces & Full Hearts  
**Lainee Stidham**
- 34 Dawson's Newest Eagle Scout
- 35 Peachy Keen Recipes  
**Amy Turnbow**
- 36 Ten Minute Talk  
**Ben Hale**



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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

Dear Church Family,

The end of the school year is upon us, and for many families, it is a time of celebration and opportunity. There are transitions and milestones to mark. Graduation ceremonies will soon give way to summer camps and family vacations.

These summer months are always an exciting time of ministry and outreach for our church family. On the cover of this magazine, you'll find a picture of Dr. Edgar Arendall's first Vacation Bible School (VBS) at Dawson in 1948, but our history of ministering to children goes back even further. Dawson's first VBS was held in 1930 with 106 children in attendance. What was once called VBS is now called KidLife at Dawson. Though the name may have changed, our commitment to share the Gospel clearly and creatively with children has not wavered.

Always the first week of June, KidLife marks the beginning of our summer activities at Dawson. More than 1000 kids and preschoolers will have the opportunity to hear about the love of Jesus each day while being invested in by 300+ adult and student volunteers. Our staff is greatly encouraged during KidLife and are thankful for all the volunteers who make this important outreach possible. I hope KidLife is already a priority on your summer calendar and that you would take the time to invite neighbors and friends.

Additionally, in this edition of the *Together at Dawson* magazine, you will be able to look back and celebrate God's hand at work in and through our church family—His people—both past and present. While there is much to learn about and celebrate, we are also excited to anticipate what is coming in the weeks ahead for our church family. Please continue to pray for those involved in a variety of summer mission projects, for the leaders who love and serve our kids week in and week out, and for our graduating seniors who embark on a new chapter of life.

May we echo the words of the Psalmist as we work, rest, and minister to our church family and community in the coming months: I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth...Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together (Psalm 34:1, 3).

Blessings,

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

Pastor David



# Life Group Stories

By Lacey Middleton



Dawson's College Group has experienced growth over the past few years. When my husband, Brian, and I began teaching in the College Life Group we averaged about 5 to 15 students each Sunday. It was a small group, but we loved being able to invite everyone over to our house after church for a meal and getting to know each student. With the addition of our college pastors, Blake Jenkins and now Cole Griffith, we have seen the average attendance go up to about 60 students each Sunday. We have loved seeing so many new students come, but we have also missed the small, close-knit feel of the smaller group. That's where College Family Groups began.

This year, Cole changed the format of our Life Group hour to introduce the students to what we call Family Groups. On Sunday mornings, we begin as a whole group to make announcements, and then we break up into our Family Groups. Each group has 15 to 25 students on any given Sunday. Each week, we get to know each other a little better with a fun icebreaker question like, "What is your favorite holiday tradition growing up?" or something silly, but also really telling, like "How many unread emails do you currently have in your inbox?" We have shared many laughs and fun stories from these questions. The remainder of our time together is spent going over the sermon, talking about what stood out, sharing things that were particularly meaningful, and walking through questions about the sermon. It is a special time where we get to share experiences and hear different perspectives. And what an encouragement it is to see the Lord at work in their lives!

These family groups have helped us create more of a sense of community. One of our favorite parts of serving with the College Ministry is getting together with the students outside of the church. We enjoy grabbing lunch after church or

bringing them into our home for dinner every now and then. These are particularly special since we are able to spend more one-on-one time with them. Brian and I have four young kids, so we try to come up with activities where our kids can participate and the college students can come and just have fun together. Some of our favorites are the pumpkin carving competition, gingerbread house decorating, and the Easter egg hunt in the spring. Our kids adore the college students and getting to spend time with them.

This year, we were also able to go out into the community to serve. This spring, we went to Grace Klein Ministries and helped serve by cleaning up and preparing a home for guests who were coming. These students gave up their Saturday to scrub bathrooms, mop floors, vacuum, and dust. They came ready to serve and stepped right up to do each task asked of them. We also had a group of our guys take a Saturday to help a woman from our church with some yard work she was unable to do on her own. Serving together is definitely a special time, learning new things, helping someone in need, and having fun all at the same time.

It has been such a privilege to walk alongside these college students in this phase of their life. We have been so impressed with them. They have such a desire for community and to be involved. They are invested in the church, and many of them serve faithfully each week, whether it's rocking babies in the nursery, investing in the student ministry, or helping out in the Rec center. They are a special group that has loved our own kids so well and blessed our family tremendously!



**Lacey Middleton** and her husband, Brian, have been members at Dawson for 10 years. They have four children, Emma, Ella, Michael, and Maybrie. They enjoy going on adventures and spending time together as a family.





# WORSHIP Is Our RESPONSE

By **John Woods**  
Music & Worship Pastor

My children are not impressed with me. Not even a little. When they were younger I stood a chance, but no more. Back then, I could do the most mundane things and I would be a hero. Blow up a balloon? They would celebrate. Dab some glue on a slightly broken toy? A small parade would ensue. Rescue a frisbee from the gigantic magnolia tree in our front yard? I'd be on the front page of the newspaper.

But now things are different.

Candlelight is one of the most significant events I contribute to at Dawson, and it's one of my favorites. Seeing all the people work together week after week to prepare something worth giving a King is both inspiring and humbling. The three nights of worship, ministry, and gift-giving to our community is an annual high watermark for me for sure.

This year, I asked my kids what they thought of Candlelight. Their answers were less than encouraging. "It was pretty good," one remarked, likely distracted by the much more impactful YouTuber on the screen. "Your face looked weird on that song you sang," another commented. My wife, Lindsay, sensing my discomfort, chimed in but failed to help. "You guys stop. That's just the way he looks when he sings." Needless to say, these were not the responses for which I had hoped.

When we come together for worship, we, too, are responding. Worship doesn't happen to us, it's given by us. We are responding to what God has already done. It's our action in response to God's action. Through Christ, the gates of Heaven have been opened to us, and we have access, unrestricted access, to the Creator of the universe. We have forgiveness from our deepest regrets, biggest mistakes, secret failures, and guilty past. Through the cross, we have an abundant life that invites us to celebrate all the good things God has given us, all the peace that abides so deep, and all of the joy we can handle.



It's out of a deep place of gratitude that we come together for worship and respond to the hope offered through the Gospel of Jesus. Our time together serves as a bookend for the beginning and end of our week, reorienting our priorities, challenging our perpetual preoccupation with self, and sending us out to be ambassadors for the Kingdom of which we are citizens. We seek to live lifestyles of worship and faithful discipleship because we have practiced what we preach in worship. When a child is learning to swim, we help them practice in the shallow end before we send them out into the open ocean. In the same way, we practice responding together to what God has done in the midst of the safety of Christian community before we are sent out into the open ocean of the world. Without the weekly rhythm of worship, we are sure to be pulled under.

I'm not sure if you remember yourself in high school, but you were weird. We all were. Not much has changed in that regard. I love working with high school students because they embrace the weird, trying on for size all sorts of values and responsibilities in their formative days here at Dawson. Like a sweater that was handed down from the previous generation, they're standing in front of a spiritual mirror asking themselves if they like the way they look in it. "Do I actually want this? Does this fit me or can I grow into it?"

One of the more interesting events that our Student Ministry has previously held was a silent disco. You might be confused at this moment, and you will not be alone. Imagine a big dance party, with hundreds of high school and middle school students gathered in the FRC. They are smiling and singing and enjoying one another's company. The DJ is over in the corner playing the radio edits to some of their favorite songs. However, one thing is different and unexpected. When you walk into the room, you hear no music. Each student has on a special set of headphones that can be tuned to one of three different channels. At any given time, three different songs are playing. On one side of the room is a group jamming out to the latest Taylor Swift song. Miley Cyrus is coming in like a wrecking ball on another channel. And while all that is happening, the rest of the students are singing throwbacks along with Journey. It's a lot of fun, but the best part is when, in a moment of serendipity, everyone finds the same channel, and they start singing together at the top of their lungs. What was just moments before a fractured cacophony of sound instantly becomes a roof-raising celebration.

We are tempted at times in worship to wish for a silent disco, aren't we? I'll switch over to my station, and you switch over to yours. I'm tired of this channel, so I'll find another. But the beauty of worship on Sunday mornings



## We respond together, singing with other people because we love them more.

is that it's more than just me-and-God time. It's us-and-God time.

We respond to God's revelation because He has displayed His greatness and love for us in Jesus and by His Holy Spirit through the Bible. We proclaim the Gospel through active participation in historically rich, culturally relevant, and biblically diverse expressions of worship and prayer to the glory of God. We tune our hearts together to the same lyrics and music, trading and enjoying them with one another before the Receiver of our gifts. We respond together, singing with other people because we love them more than our preferences. And when the guy down the pew, facing the weight of his circumstances, just can't bring himself to sing, we turn up our own voice just a little louder to encourage him not to give up. What results is a roof-raising celebration of the Giver of Life.

So this week as you worship, join in the song that is already in progress, a tune that all of creation is singing. Take off the headphones, link arms with the fellow travelers who surround you, and turn up your voice. Don't seek to be impressive; seek to be obedient. Risk experiencing the joy of a response to God's goodness that compels you to plant your feet, fill your lungs, lift your head, and declare the praise of the only One worthy to receive it.



**John Woods** is Dawson's Music & Worship Pastor. John attended Baylor University, receiving a Master of Music in Church Music and a Master of Divinity in Theology from George W. Truett Theological Seminary. When there's time, John likes searching for hole-in-the-wall restaurants with his wife, Lindsay, and their children Hudson, Emma, and Mason.



## **KIDLIFE, OUR VERSION OF UBS, IS DAWSON'S LARGEST GOSPEL-CENTERED OUTREACH EVENT OF THE YEAR.**

Each year, Dawson's Preschool Ministry and Dawson Kids Ministry partner together to create a fun, relevant, exciting week of Bible teaching, worship, and activities. This year's theme is Pass The Torch! Preschoolers and children will share this theme, daily points, and the key Bible verse from Matthew 5:16.

**Let your light shine before men so that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.**  
—Matthew 5:16

Bible lessons and activities during KidLife are specifically designed for each age group. Kids will see how they can "Pass The Torch" while they explore the truth of God's Word through the stories of Jesus.

Participants will learn about the one True Light, Jesus, who invites them to follow Him and to shine their light to the world. Both kids and preschoolers will focus on these daily main points:

- **LOVE JESUS**
- **BELIEVE THE BIBLE**
- **SERVE OTHERS**
- **SHARE THE GOOD NEWS**

Dawson's KidLife is for children who are age 4 by September 1, 2024 through 5th Grade completed.

Participant registration is now open online. Please visit **[dawsonchurch.org/KidLife](http://dawsonchurch.org/KidLife)** to register. **Registration will close at noon on May 24.**





For more details on how you can get involved at KidLife, please contact:

**Brooke Gibson** | Minister to Preschoolers  
bgibson@dawsonchurch.org

**Meg Brown** | Minister to Children  
mbrown@dawsonchurch.org





# SHINE OUR LIGHTS

HOW THIS  
KIDLIFE ORIGINAL  
CAME TO BE

By Kara Fincher  
AUXANO Worship Associate



When Meg Brown asked me to lead worship for Dawson Kids during KidLife 2024, we immediately began talking about songs. After learning this year's theme (Pass the Torch) and main Bible verse (Matthew 5:16), I told Meg I would do some research before our official song-planning meeting the following week. I spent the next several evenings researching music and found myself saying to my husband, Caleb, "I'm just not thrilled with any of these options. Maybe I'll just write one." I was halfway kidding when I said it, but nonetheless, within 24 hours we had a song.

I called Meg the next afternoon and casually mentioned the idea of using an original song. She was open to it, but asked if this year's Bible verse could be part of the lyrics. I then admitted that I had already written a song, but would figure out a way to incorporate the verse before letting her hear a demo.

When I explained our idea of an original KidLife song to John Woods, our Music & Worship Pastor, I shared that the Bible verse needed to be in the song and that the dilemma was that we needed to use the exact translation used on the posters, t-shirts, etc., since the kids would use them for memorizing throughout the week. This made the rhyme and rhythm a bit more challenging. John so quickly said, "Easy! Just make a bridge. Come with me." We walked to the nearest piano in the church and without any hesitation, John played a few chords and sang Matthew 5:16 word-for-word. We had a little editing here and there, but within five minutes, the song was finished.

I squealed in excitement the whole way back down to the first floor offices and found Meg, Hannah, and Madelyn. "We did it! The song is going to work! Matthew 5:16 is in the song!! EEEEEK HOW FUN!" (...or something dramatic, joyful, and obnoxiously loud along those lines).

After work, I sang the song to Caleb a cappella and he ran with it. Since we have a studio in our home, we were able to record *Shine Our Lights* over the next couple of days. Caleb wrote and played every instrument that you hear in the track, and he mixed and mastered all of the audio.

We let the song "sit" for a couple of weeks and realized that it was missing an important element—a kids choir. We were thrilled to have help from Emma, Ella, and Michael Middleton, along with James and Sadie Blackman as singers in our kids choir. These precious kids learned the song and then spent their spare time recording it with us. (Thank you to their moms and dads.)

After the album cover was completed using this year's KidLife logo, the single was finalized and ready for digital distribution on Spotify, Apple Music, etc. We hope that you will "sing out loud" at KidLife this year and be "shining lights" for all the world to see!



# Shine Our Lights

Key - C | Tempo - 190 | Time - 6/8  
Caleb Fincher, Kara Fincher, John Woods

## Verse 1

Maybe I'll be a swimmer  
Maybe I'll run a race  
Maybe I'll be a boxer  
Or surf on a big wave

## Pre-Chorus

Maybe I'll win a medal  
Or a champion's ring  
Wherever God has me  
This song I'll always sing:

## Chorus

We love Jesus with all of our hearts  
We believe that the Bible is true  
We will love and serve one another  
We will go and tell the good news

## Tag

We will shine, shine, shine our lights  
We will shine, shine, shine our lights  
We will shine, shine, shine our lights  
For all the world to see

## Verse 2

Maybe I'll be a gymnast  
Maybe I'll row a boat  
Maybe I'll be a golfer  
Or play water polo

## Bridge

Let your light  
Shine before men  
So that they may see your good deeds  
And praise your Father in heaven  
Matthew five sixteen

© Caleb Fincher, Kara Fincher, John Woods | 2024



MORE FROM KARA

## ABOUT THE LYRICS

The song *Shine Our Lights* incorporates summer Olympic sports in the verses. I really wanted an opportunity for some fun motions with a nod to this year's unique theme.

You will probably notice that the verses use "I" language and the chorus uses "we" language. This was intentional! The Apostle Paul teaches about the intersection of individuality and the corporate body in 1 Corinthians 12. God is the giver of gifts and has gifted each of His children individually, but at the end of the day, we join together with other Christian brothers and sisters to sing the song of faith. We put the "I" aside when we come together for corporate worship.

The chorus incorporates this year's "Daily Point" for KidLife. Monday, kids will learn that they can love Jesus. Tuesday, they will learn that they can believe the Bible. Wednesday, kids will learn that they can serve others, and Thursday that they can share the good news.

The bridge is this year's Bible verse, Matthew 5:16. We were careful to use the exact translation that our kids will be learning at KidLife. To listen to *Shine Our Lights* before KidLife, visit [dawsonchurch.org/shineourlights](http://dawsonchurch.org/shineourlights)



**Kara Fincher** is a Mississippi native and graduate of Samford University and Beeson Divinity School. She recently transitioned her role on Dawson's College Ministry staff as AUXANO's Worship Associate. Kara is married to Caleb, and they have a daughter named Grace. Kara and Caleb spend their free time co-writing and producing worship music.

# Life Groups

## & Lifelong Friends

By **Meg Brown** | Minister to Children

For 35 years, Pat Boggs has been serving Dawson Kids. Imagine all the children she has been able to impact during those 35 years! Pat and her fellow classroom teachers, Sarah Minor and TC Brightbill, have served together teaching 2nd graders for more than 20 years. Recently they shared their thoughts with us about serving together as a team.

### From Pat

Would you pray about teaching Sunday School in our Children's Department?" Those words were spoken to me by Jan Jones, Dawson's Children's Director at the time. I had been praying about how to better serve the Lord in our church since the sudden death of my husband, Terry. Jan told me another teacher was needed in the 2nd grade class that my son, Brandon, would be entering. I told her I would give it a try. Thirty-five years later, I'm still in 2nd grade! What a blessing it is to help a child open the Bible, find a verse, and follow along as we study a story about Jesus.

I love to listen as the children share prayer requests or talk about fun things they did during the week. I am blessed to serve with two other teachers, Sarah Minor and TC Brightbill. We didn't start teaching 2nd grade Life Group as Bible scholars (we never will be) or experts on seven-year-olds (no way) We do, however, come every week with excitement and anticipation of what the Lord will be teaching us.

He never fails! We come with love for the Lord, love for His word, love for the children, and the desire to serve and be used by Him. One Sunday, not long after the start of the new Life Group year, one of the boys came up to me and asked, "Where's that man?"

"You mean Mr. TC?," I responded.

"Yeah," he said. "I miss him."

The children may not be sure of our names, but it is my prayer that they are sure that God loves them and we do too.

Dawson Kids Ministry provides all we need to teach: lessons that are easy to explain, craft supplies, training, encouragement and support, and it's all covered in prayer. We are very grateful for their leadership.

Sarah, TC, and I pray for our 2nd graders to grow in their knowledge and love of God and His word. We also pray for each other and our families. We have shared with each other many times how God has answered those prayers. I am thankful for these two mighty prayer warriors and faithful friends.

Left to right:  
Pat Boggs,  
TC Brightbill  
and Sarah  
Minor.





## From Sarah

I fondly remember Jan Jones making a visit to my home to ask me to consider teaching 2nd grade Sunday School over 20 years ago. After much prayer and consideration, I decided to jump right in. That was a decision I have never regretted. Words cannot express the blessings that I have received from teaching children!

At the time I agreed to teach, little did I know that I would work alongside Pat and TC for so many years. We work so well together, sharing teaching responsibilities each week. Our main focus is teaching God's Word by modeling the use of our Bibles and with activities that support and reinforce our Bible lessons. We work on learning the books of the Bible to make it easier for the children to maneuver. We pray for our children regularly and desire for them to learn to love God's Word and how to apply it to their young lives.

Teaching with Pat and TC is such a blessing to my life. The friendship and bond we share is special and has helped me grow in my personal walk with the Lord. We lean on each other for spiritual inspiration, for prayers in time of need, for rejoicing in times of joy, and for talking just among friends.

Sundays have changed over the years with new curriculum, new Children's Ministers, new teaching spaces and new names (Life Groups not Sunday School). What hasn't changed, however, is the top priority—Dawson teaching God's Word and helping the children in their faith! Our prayer for the children is for each of them to grow in their faith,

as we plant seeds for the Lord as His servants to the 2nd graders.

## From TC

When I reflect on serving in 2nd grade Life Group, it's very hard to put into words all of God's blessings He has poured out upon us over the years. Serving alongside Pat Boggs and Sarah Minor has enriched my life tremendously! Their faithfulness in serving the Lord, how they share His Word and His love with so many children, recognizing the depth of their faith, and how it is the center of their lives is inspiring. The three of us have become steadfast friends in Christ, rejoicing with each other in victories, and praying for each other in adversities.

## Our Lord, in His perfect wisdom, put me back in 2nd grade!

The wonderful children who have come through our class are such a joy. In 2nd grade, the kids have no agenda or chip on their shoulder. Sometimes they have a Bible background, and sometimes they don't. But their minds and hearts are open to the Word of God, and they never fail to surprise us by recalling what we have taught them, even when they appear to be distracted. There are few things as rewarding, while serving our Lord, than telling twenty 2nd graders that Jesus loves them! When I look at each child, I see such tremendous potential to grow God's kingdom, and how these children will one day become

adults that God can use for His honor and glory. To contribute just a fraction to their spiritual growth has few equals in life.

Because I didn't become a Christian until I was 17, I missed many of the grade school Bible stories from the Old Testament that are commonly taught to children. So our Lord, in His perfect wisdom, put me back in 2nd grade! During my years of teaching, we have taught many, many Old Testament stories describing the nature of God, His trustworthy characteristics, His great love for us, and the unshakable anchor of His perfect word. While teaching these truths, my spiritual life has grown in leaps and bounds, resulting in a closeness with Him that I could never have imagined. I praise Him for placing them in that role, and I'm so grateful to serve side-by-side with such faithful servants of Christ.

Pat, Sarah, and TC are certainly exceptional servant leaders at our church. But their experience of growing in the love of God and the love of His people is the gift that is for all Life Group leaders! Whether you serve preschoolers or 2nd graders, the treasure of deeper faith in the Lord and a greater love in His family can be yours. Would you prayerfully consider joining us, like Pat, TC, and Sarah, to serve as a Life Group leader?



**Meg Brown** joined the Dawson team in 2019 and serves as our Minister to Children. Meg enjoys the outdoors, reading Wendell Berry, and walks with her dog, Russell.





# Witnessing God's FAITHFULNESS

By Jan Jones



Dawson Sunday School Leaders, 1965

RECENTLY, I SAT IN A MEETING WITH 30 INDIVIDUALS WHOSE AGES RANGED FROM 26 TO 81. OUR DISCUSSION CENTERED ON DAWSON'S **PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE.**

One of the consistent themes throughout that discussion was how each of these individuals had had their lives impacted by the people at Dawson. Many named the person (or people) who had led them to Christ, impacted their spiritual growth, offered community, loved them through illnesses and loss, celebrated with them in times of joy, served alongside them on mission trips, and in teaching Sunday School. As we talked about those shared experiences, we felt God's presence in our midst, and a feeling of gratitude permeated the room.

As I listened to these faithful saints (those young and not so young), I thought about all of the people who were not in the room, but who are still impacting us from above.

Hebrews 12:1 begins: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses..." These witnesses in this verse are the faithful followers of God who came before us.

I remembered the names of the countless individuals I knew personally who are in this "Great Cloud of Witnesses." Many of them had also been mentioned by these 30 adults as they told stories about those who had helped shaped their spiritual lives. I left the meeting thanking God for His continued faithfulness and goodness. I started to think more about those who had shaped my own life. My Mom and my Dad are at the top of the list. My Dad (Jim Lee) came from a Baptist family that was rich in service and love for God. Mama (Corinne Lee) was originally from a Methodist



background. Mama always said that the Methodists are just like Baptists, except the Methodists can read. Regardless of their religious backgrounds, Mom and Dad taught our family that if you loved God, you served Him in whatever way you could. I saw that early on in the way that my parents served at Dawson.

My Dad, along with Marion Fink, served as "the" Audio-Visual Team from the 60s to the early 80s. They lugged projectors, film strips, and audio tapes from one side of Dawson to the other each Sunday morning. This was so the Sunday School teachers who wanted to show a film, use slides as their visuals, or cassette tapes to hear a missionary's testimony would have easy access to the equipment they needed. It was not glorious work—not even noticeable work—yet it was just "loving to serve" in the name of God to the church they loved.

When the roles for the Audio-Visual Team became a thing of the past, Mom and Dad served as greeters and hosts on Sunday morning. They loved welcoming people to Dawson, especially new guests. They remembered what it felt like to not know where you were going at a new church, and especially how it felt not knowing a single person there!

Today, my old friend, Bob West, welcomes people each Sunday at my Dad's old door (the North Building crosswalk) along with my young friend, Dante Torres. Bob and Dante begin our mornings with a smile and a welcome. They, as well as all of our Dawson greeters, make us feel wanted and loved on Sunday mornings.

I remember my Mom and her friend, Annie Laura Burton, would often tell stories of when Vacation Bible School lasted for a full two weeks. (Remember the thousands of macaroni bows and elbows that we glued onto cigar boxes and then covered in gold paint? What treasures they were to us!)

Because of Mom's commitment to serve during VBS, we would arrive early so Mom and Annie Laura could make kool-aid in huge galvanized buckets for the day's refreshments. Of course, all the snacks were homemade—there were no prepackaged snacks for the kids of the 60s. I am confident that in our great Cloud

of Witnesses there are the many moms who cooked countless cookies and made kool-aid for two solid weeks!

When my family and I became members at Dawson, I didn't know a soul. But not to worry, I possessed the gift of "gab." I can remember my 6th grade Sunday School teacher (Mrs. Lambert) calling my mom to ask her if she could help me not talk during Sunday School. Or if I did talk, at least have it relate to the lesson. I'll never forget Mrs. Lambert. She loved me and was extremely gracious to me—in spite of my inability to remain quiet. Then there was Mrs. Irene Hoffman. Mrs. Hoffman was the first non-family adult that invited me to her home. She invited the entire 6th grade Sunday School class to lunch one Sunday after the 11:00 church service. Oh my, how I loved Mrs. Hoffman! She taught me that God uses women (other than your family members) to help you develop spiritual gifts for God to use in His kingdom. I know that these wonderful ladies are in our Cloud of Witnesses.

In the mid-1960s, you actually stayed overnight in the homes of the church members when you were on Chapel Choir Tour. These were people who put up with giggling girls (who couldn't stop talking) all night long. These witnesses surrounded us with prayer, home cooked meals, and clean sheets. Around this same time period, Dawson's students (grades 9–12) went to summer camp at

Kittiwake on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. (Kittiwake was swept away in 1969 during Hurricane Camille, the worst to ever hit our nation.) Glenn and Velma O'Neal were youth leaders. Glenn was lovingly referred to as "Big Daddy," and Velma was a petite lady who always spoke with graciousness and love. She was my cabin counselor one summer. Now remember, I liked to talk. Late one night she stood in the middle of the cabin and announced with her loving, southern drawl, "Jan Lee, if you MUST whisper, at least whisper a prayer." I actually received the Honor Camper award that year, but I think it was given out of sympathy for her calling me out! Big Daddy and Velma are definitely in our Cloud of Witnesses alongside many others because of their faithfulness to all of us teenagers.

Meanwhile, back at Dawson, the church had purchased the old grocery store (where the Parking Building is located now) and used it for Sunday School classes. There were many moms and dads who spent untold hours making the grocery store's back storage rooms into a "hang-out" for the high schoolers. Parents took wooden doors and made couches. They used concrete blocks and planks of wood to make shelves. They brought in record players and vinyls, painted the concrete walls a "hip" color, bought grills to make hamburgers and hot dogs, and installed a small kitchen for quick and easy meals. These parents



Jan Jones in 1962, with (top left to right) her mom, siblings Julia & Jim, and her dad.



modeled how to show love to kids by providing a space that the kids would enjoy. It may sound old fashioned now, but it was rather forward thinking in those days, but the parents wanted the kids to stay connected to church, and for the late 1960s, it worked.

I will always fondly remember Fern and Woody Watkins. Under the guidance of Betty Pittman, Dawson's Adult Minister, they began a Sunday School class for those married adults who didn't quite fit into the "married with two kids and a mini van" category. Many in this class were adults who had married later in life or were in their second marriage. Fern and Woody were fun, eclectic characters whose understanding of God's Word was phenomenal. The whole class felt like we sat at the foot of Mt. Sinai on Sunday mornings. Fern and Woody created an atmosphere for those of us whose lives did not fit the norm. They often opened their home to us and would say, "You don't have to buy anything." My husband, Dale, and I did not understand what that meant until we entered their home for the first time. Their house was actually an antique shop so everything you sat on or walked on was for sale! We were accepted and loved in the Dawson family because of them.

The very first Nativity made in 1988, still done the same way now.



Fern took a liking to me (she liked to talk too) and decided I needed to learn public speaking and stage presence. I learned so much from her, not knowing that God was using her to prepare me for future service to Him.

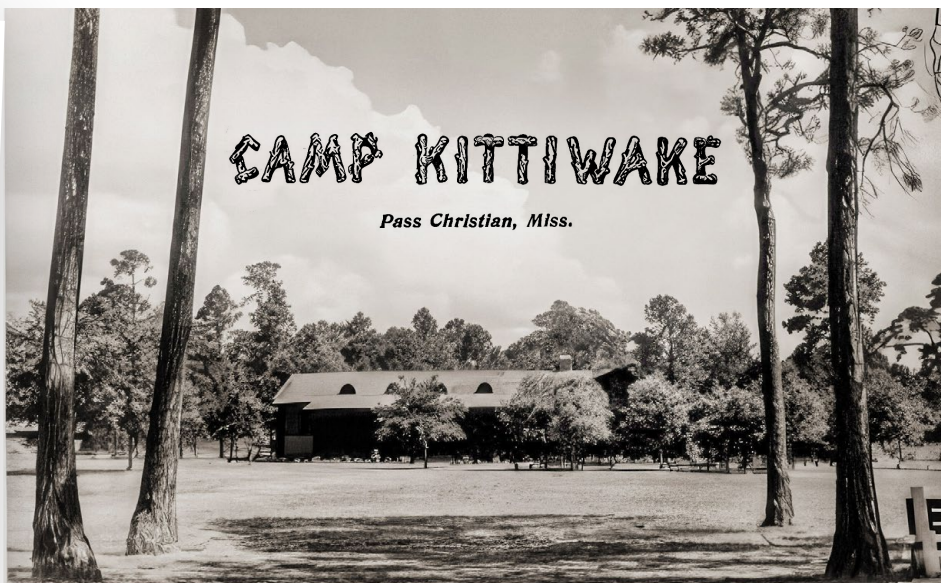
Milton Gwaltney is another faithful saint making up our Cloud of Witnesses. When I began my tenure on Dawson's staff, I served as the Children's Minister. One Christmas season, we realized that we had an unplanned Wednesday night, and I had the idea that we would have a "Christmas House." We would divide the kids into groups and rotate them through the classrooms where they would make a different Christmas craft in each one. In the early stages of planning, I brought three tiny rounded pegs to Milton and Claire Gwaltney and asked them if they could make a nativity scene using these. Milton and Claire took an obscure idea and three small pegs and created a Christmas tradition for every 2nd grade Sunday School class at Dawson. Since 1988, all 2nd graders have made this exact keepsake nativity that draws their family's attention to the birth of Jesus.

Another couple, JC and Pat Herring, were fabulous Young Adult Sunday School teachers (and Youth Leaders when their kids were students.)

In the early 90s, Pat and I would help Bob Hatfield with the Back Yard Bible Clubs for Chapel Choir Tour. We would leave groups of choir kids with their adult leaders at predetermined sites and load them down with Bible story materials, crafts, sports equipment, and snacks. Snacks included premade "bug juice," cookies, and paper supplies for the crafts and snacks. After a drop off, Pat realized that she had not picked up the paper products for the snacks. She only had the cookies and the large Igloo cooler of bug juice. Pat always met life head-on, and this day was no different. She had all the campers lay down in a line, faced up. She then engaged two strong choir students to hold the Igloo cooler over each kid's face and instructed the kids to "open their mouths wide." She proceeded to press the spigot button and poured the juice into each thirsty camper! JC and Pat taught me how to face life with energy and creativity. They brought much joy to others because their love for God was their motivating reason for life.

I know that Donnett Owens and Annie Wilson are in my Cloud of Witnesses. Donnett was a church member as well as Church Hostess. She was petite but mighty, and she oversaw the many meals that were prepared for the church family. The church's favorite meal was spaghetti with garlic bread topped off with Annie's delicious cinnamon rolls.





Sweet Annie. She loved God. And the church LOVED those cinnamon rolls! As she hand rolled and cooked them, she always hummed a hymn. Annie worked in the church kitchen for more than 30 years. She and Donnett created an atmosphere of love and goodness on Wednesday nights. All who were there knew and experienced God's love through those delicious meals.

There are a million "Dawson stories" all of you could tell. Stories of individuals who God used to shape your life. God stories—that is what I call them. Sometimes you don't even realize that God is at work until months or years later. Stories of Life Group leaders who said just the right words at just the right time. Stories of Dawson members who were with you during hard times as well as times of celebrations. Stories of "wild memories" at summer camp or Choir Tours that turned into holy moments. Stories of staff members and loved ones who made such an impact upon your

life that you can't sing a certain song or read a certain Bible verse without seeing their face in your mind. Those people, when they get to Heaven, will make up your own "Cloud of Witnesses." Thank God for your Cloud. And also thank Him for the faithful followers who came before them.

*Sometimes you don't even realize that God is at work until months or years later.*

I love reading the book, *Light in the Valley* (by Ray and Doris Atchison) and learning about how Dawson came to be. Mrs. J.T. Callaway, one of our founders, was instrumental from the very beginning. Quoting from the book, "I got busy trying to find enough Baptists in the vicinity to organize a church." All of Dawson should rise up and call her blessed! It is because of her faithfulness (and others) that we stand on a corner of Oxmoor Road today.

On April 5, 1925, our founders, officially organized Edgewood Baptist Church. This church would later be renamed L.O. Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, after the death of their beloved pastor, Dr. L.O. Dawson. The dedication plaque in the Vestibule of the Sanctuary states, "He loved us."

I am confident that our "Great Cloud of Witnesses" includes Mrs. J.T. Callaway, members of Edgewood Baptist Church, Dr. L.O. Dawson, and thousands who have come after.

As we prepare to celebrate 100 years of God's faithfulness at Dawson next year on April 6, 2025, let us continue to be found faithful like those who came before us. May our lives strive to welcome those who need a church home, like Mrs. Callaway. May we show our love to others in all that we do, like Dr. Dawson, and may we eagerly find a place to serve God at His church because of our love for Him, like Jim and Corrine Lee and so many others. There is no greater joy than serving Him!

Hebrews Chapter 12:2 continues with this: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith." May our 100-year celebration bring God all glory and honor and praise as we fix our eyes on Jesus.



Jan Jones' parents, Jim & Corinne Lee in 2004.



**Jan Jones** served on Dawson's staff from 1986 to 2014 as Children's Minister, Adult Minister, and then Minister of Education. You can find her still involved at Dawson in a variety of ministries. She is married to Dale who was the behind the scenes "minister" during her tenure at Dawson. Dale and Jan have two adult daughters, four grandchildren, two huskies, and one mean cat.



# CONGRATULATIONS 2024 SENIORS!



Will Arendall



Claire Bailey



Allie Bates



Madeline Beam



Gibson Bean



Witt Brown



Chanley Bunshaw



Walker Cole



Gracie Cook



Jack Davis



Alden Dorn



Hayden Eldridge



Molly Elmore



Harrison Faust



Brianna Flores



Matthew Floyd



Jackson Frey



Trey Garlington



Elizabeth Gillum



Ellie Glenn



Caroline Griffin



Megan Harris





Aubrey Helms



Hannah Hudson



Christopher Hughes



Haley Hulsey



Maddie Hunsberger



Haleigh Kelley



Jackson Kittinger



Mae Martin



Aniyah McCaslin



Tucker Meek



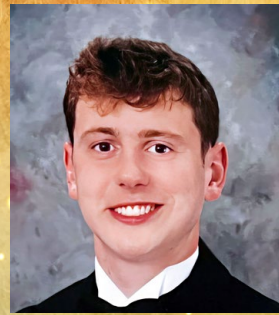
Hannah Mintz



Lilli Myers



Nicholas Myers



Chapman Newsom



Harrison O'Dell



Benjamin Payne



Olivia Plant



Jordan Poe



Frank Daniel Poole



Wilson Riley



Jack Bailey Sain



Lydia Smith



Claudia Williams



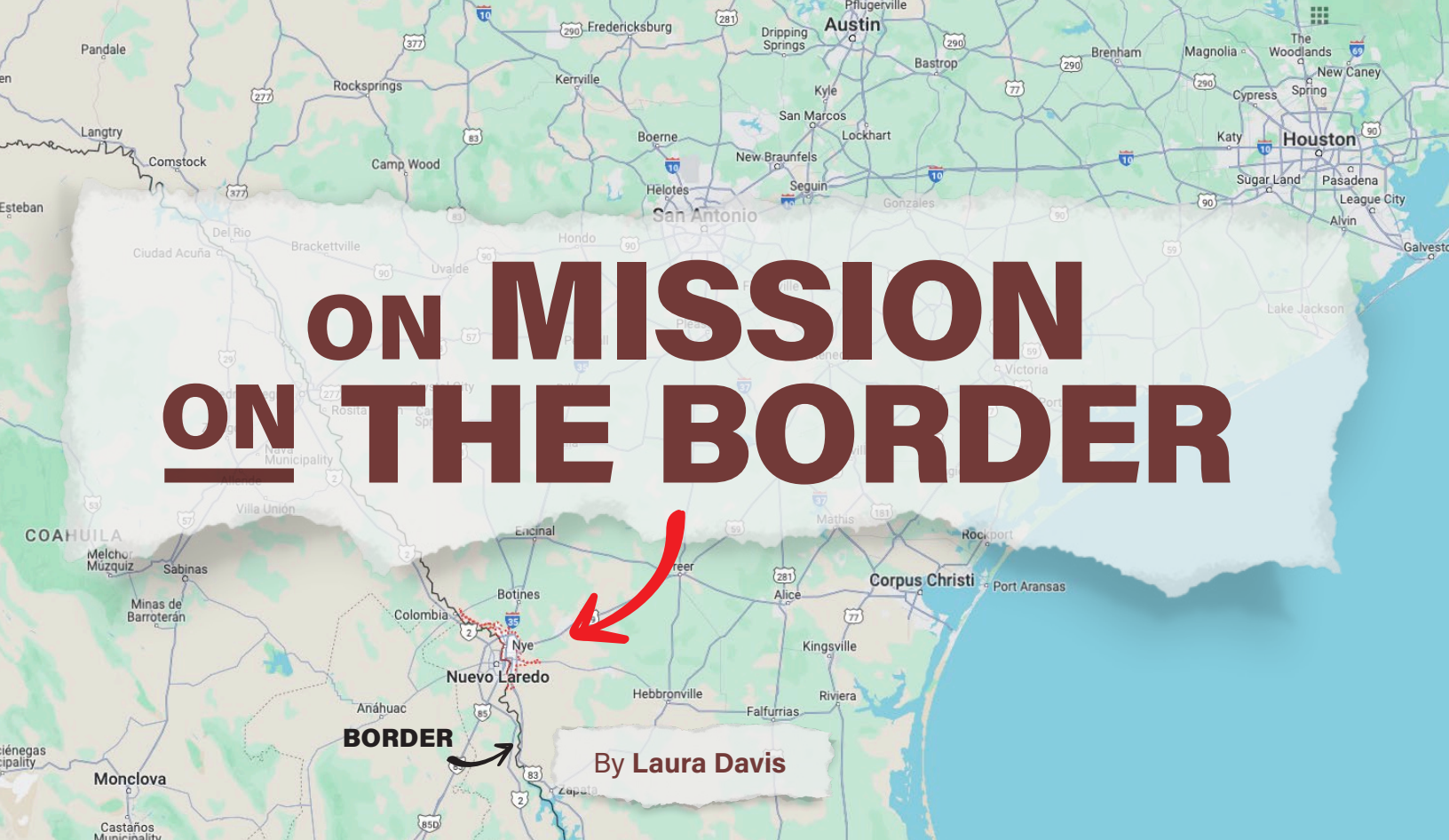
John Mark Williams



John Michael Yanosky

NOT PICTURED: Molly Grill





# ON MISSION ON THE BORDER

**BORDER**

By Laura Davis

Our family had been thinking about serving on a mission trip during spring break for a while; **BUT WE NEVER IMAGINED THAT IT WOULD BE IN LAREDO, TEXAS.**

"I'll be honest, we were initially a little anxious about going to Laredo and being so close to the border. Although we did not know what to expect, we chose to have faith in God and in our church and committed to going on the project as a family. To say that the trip was amazing would be a gross understatement. We were able to see firsthand how God is working in the lives of the people of Laredo.

The project was coordinated through Send Relief, a joint venture with the North American Mission Board (NAMB) and the International Mission Board (IMB). Send Relief is a trusted partner for vetting and promoting effective, Gospel-centered ministries. Their website explains that Laredo is one of the oldest border crossings in America's history and serves as the United States' largest land-based entry point. Because of this history, Laredo is a unique melting pot of a city that seamlessly blends the cultures of the U.S. and Mexico. With this knowledge in hand, we were packed and ready to go.

We arrived at our camp on Saturday afternoon. The adults and teenage girls had "motel style" rooms, and across the parking lot, the teenage boys slept in a huge room full of bunk beds. We also had a dining hall where we ate many meals and did Jazzercise—yep, we sure did! All of this was behind a large gate, so we felt very safe the entire time we were there. On Sunday, our team was split into groups, and we went to two different churches. Bryan Howard, our

Minister to Students, preached at one church, and Ben Hewitt, our Associate Minister to Middle School Students, preached at the other one, each with their own interpreters. Our team lead the music at one of the churches, and they did an amazing job! Thank goodness, Anna Johnston went with our group, because she speaks Spanish fluently. My son, Jack, gave his testimony at one church, while Hayden Eldridge gave his testimony at the other church. They both did a wonderful job.

The next day we held a backyard sports event with the neighborhood families. We had a great turnout. Laredo is 97% Hispanic, but it was helpful that many of the people spoke English. We played soccer, volleyball, jump rope, and more. It was a wonderful time with all of the precious kids. After we played outside, we had a church service. Jack and Hayden gave their testimonies again, and then we sang some worship songs in English and in Spanish. After the service, we broke up into small groups to have discussion time. In my group, one lady teared up and shared how



much she loved seeing all of our kids in worship. She said she wanted to thank the two boys who gave their testimonies because that was the first time her children had heard the Gospel from another teenager. She had been praying for her children to become friends with other believers. It was amazing how God placed her in between Danielle Eldridge and me during our small group time. She had no idea that Jack and Hayden were our boys when she shared that with us. After our circle time, we all gathered for dinner. I looked and saw that Jack was sitting right next to the lady's son. Jack had no clue who the boy was or what his mom had been praying about. It was little moments like these that I knew God was involved in all the details of the trip.

The next day, some of us went to one of the churches and started to paint the sanctuary. The rest of us, including my family, went to the Laredo Ministry Center, a respite center for migrants. The center provides displaced families along the U.S.-Mexico border with food, clothes, hygiene kits, and the hope of new life in the Gospel.

This may have been the hardest day emotionally for me from the whole trip. When we arrived at the center, we talked to the director for a long while. He explained to us how the center was run, what happens when the refugees get there, and what happens afterwards. The refugees can stay at the center for 24 hours after they cross the border. They are fed meals and are able to sleep on a cot in the rooms that are set up like a motel.



The Davis family, Jack, Laura, Chris, and Will (center) with some new friends from Venezuela.

The first refugee we met there was a 35-year-old female who had Down syndrome. This really hit close to home for me because our daughter, Grace, has Down syndrome. I never imagined I would hear the things I heard regarding this woman's experience.

## THIS REALLY HIT HOME FOR ME BECAUSE OUR DAUGHTER, GRACE, HAS DOWN SYNDROME.

She had come from El Salvador, and had been human trafficked all through Mexico. In Houston, her "friend" had told her that he would be right back

as he went into a store, but that didn't happen. Somehow, she found a business card with the name of the director of the ministry center in Laredo. She got on a bus by herself and went from Houston to Laredo. Remember, she has Down syndrome. She has no parents or caregivers to help her at all. When I asked about her later in our visit at the center she evidently had left for the day. The director told us that she goes out on the streets during the day and comes back to sleep at night. The refugees usually stay there 24 hours, but she's been there for over a year. The director also shared with me that she had been pregnant two times. Her first pregnancy was a miscarriage, and her second baby was stillborn. She was also an alcoholic. Through the concern in his eyes, you could see how he had taken on the role as her adopted dad. Unfortunately, I never got the chance to talk with her one-on-one but I will NEVER forget meeting her.

That is just one of the many really hard, horrific stories we heard. We met various families who had been traveling for months from Venezuela. During their journey, they witnessed suicide, murder, decapitation, amputation of limbs after jumping onto the trains, and some had experienced being kidnapped by the cartel. We ministered to precious children who had been through similar stories. In an attempt to allow them to forget their struggles for a brief moment, we were able to have some fun with them by playing basketball, painting their fingernails, painting pictures with them, and braiding their hair. We also packed grocery bags full of canned and dry goods for the refugees.

When we first got there and took a tour of the center, the director told us, "You are about to hear some very hard stories. You will not be able to fix their situations and circumstances but just be there to listen. The people want someone to listen to their stories. You can pray for them and be a listening ear." I am grateful that he gave us those instructions because throughout







**IGLESIA BAPTISTA  
NUEVO NACIMIENTO**

**DAWSON  
STUDENT MINISTRY**



the day I desired to bring each one of those children home to care for them, especially the young lady with Down syndrome. It was so eye opening and a very heavy day for our family. It sure put our lives into perspective. We are all so blessed.

For the rest of the week, we had VBS with children in the local churches. We only had about six or seven kids, but they had a great time. I was so impressed with our teenagers from Dawson. They conducted the entire VBS. We had music time, snack time, craft making, and recreation. The children we met were adorable, and they loved our kids.

After we finished painting the sanctuary and hallway of one church, we heard from Pastor Pastor (that is his name!) He teared up telling us that he loved seeing us in his church. It held maybe 40 people, so most of the chairs were filled with us all there. He cried when he told us that since COVID, he has averaged five people in attendance at the church on Sundays. So, in a community outreach effort, we walked to homes around the neighborhood and handed out flyers for his church.

We will continue to pray that God opens the hearts and souls of the people in the community to find his church and attend on a regular basis.

The last day we were there we went to a park and fed the homeless. Our kids packed 150 sack lunches, and we handed them out at the park. We also had some very meaningful conversations with the people and gave out bracelets that represented the life of Jesus. One man confessed his daily battles with drugs.

The last family we met in the park was a couple from Venezuela who had just been released by kidnappers. They had been held by the cartel for five days. Their captors had taken all of their possessions. They were waiting on a bus to take them to Maryland to be with family. Being from Venezuela, they told us they made approximately \$40 a week and their family could not survive on that anymore. They had left their little girl back home because the journey to the US was too dangerous. We gave them clothes, shoes, and food to take with them to Maryland. They were so appreciative. We prayed over them and then they left to catch the bus.

These are just a few of the amazing stories we heard that week in Laredo. We will be in prayer for each one of those families and for the churches we served. Our family realized this week that no matter what our political belief is about the border, these people bear the image of God, and He loves them all just as He loves us. We cannot answer the question of why we are so blessed in our station in life. However, we believe that it is our responsibility, as followers of Christ, to serve all people regardless of race, creed, or country of origin.

We will continue to pray for all the people in the Laredo area that Jesus will meet the physical, and more importantly, the spiritual needs of this community. We humbly request that you do the same.



**Laura Davis** graduated from Birmingham-Southern College with a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education. She and her husband, Chris, joined Dawson in 2004, and have volunteered in a variety of ministries. They have three children, Grace, Jack, and Will. Laura loves to exercise and watch her boys play soccer. She is also involved with Down Syndrome Alabama, an organization that advocates for individuals with Down syndrome.

## YOUNG BUT WILLING

As an eighth grader, I questioned my ability to make a significant impact in Laredo. After all, what could I, with such a limited amount of experience, offer to those who had endured more than I could ever understand? Our plans for this mission trip were to do humanitarian relief work, paint a church, and then host a community VBS with two local churches. As we talked with the people at the Laredo Ministry Center, I experienced the power of compassion and empathy. The people at the center had been cleared to come into our country because they were fleeing something terrible in their home countries. Whether it was listening to someone's story or offering them food, every small gesture mattered.

One man I met was named Daniel. Daniel had walked from Venezuela with his girlfriend for a long time to get here. They were in the jungle for more than three days. He is probably in Ohio by now, trying to build a new life in America. Despite his hardships, Daniel was always willing to play basketball with me and the other guys who were there.

I will always remember how kind he was to me, and how much we enjoyed talking about basketball. I liked sharing a happy moment with him.

With each day, I found myself stepping more and more out of my comfort zone. Like when we distributed lunches to people in a local park and shared the good news of Jesus with them. We met Carlos, who was a Christian and knew lots about the Bible. We also had a man throw half of his orange at us when we tried to share with him. We turned the other cheek and moved on.

Despite my initial doubts, I learned that you don't have to do big things to make a difference. God can use whatever you bring to the table. Through simple acts of kindness and stepping out of my comfort zone, I was able to witness the huge impact of God's love on those facing adversity. And maybe at the end of the day, the biggest impact of all was made on me.



**Isaac Plant** is an 8th grader at Pizitz Middle School. In his free time, he enjoys playing football, basketball, track and music.



# FOUR FRIENDS | FOR GOD

By Dr. Randy Stewart

THE FIRST AND THE LAST, THE ONE WHO WAS DEAD AND CAME TO LIFE, SAYS, "I KNOW YOUR AFFLICTION AND POVERTY, YET YOU ARE RICH."

*Revelation 2:8-9*



"I want you to go on a medical mission trip to Guatemala." These words from my pastor thirteen years ago changed my life. Even though I immediately said "yes," I did so reluctantly. Granted, I had good credentials to be a medical-church support volunteer. I was a physician, a bi-vocational music minister, and the son of a pastor. In fact, my father had been in charge of Tennessee Baptist mission partnerships with the Philippines, Venezuela, and Chile, but I never went with him on any of his mission excursions—something I truly regret now. My excuse was that I was too busy. I told him I was too busy with school, too busy with medical practice, and too busy at church. The truth was that I really didn't want to go. This time, however, there was no excuse, because it was God who was prompting me.

Our team traveled to the city of Jalapa, a three-hour drive into the mountains east of Guatemala City. There we encountered shocking widespread poverty. Many people struggled for life's essentials, including medical care. Diabetics, hypertensives, and epileptics could not obtain their medications, due either to lack of funds or supply.

We teamed with a wonderful congregation in downtown Jalapa—the Life In Jesus Baptist Church. These visionary Christians, themselves poor, had established a mission

church in Los Laureles, one the poorest areas on the outskirts of Jalapa. Four hundred yards from that mission church was the city dump, where families lived in shelters made of trash and scavenged for food, clothing, and recyclables.

The call of God was clear as we left Jalapa that week. We must partner with the Guatemalan Christians and minister to the people who were both spiritually and physically ill. It was similar to the approach Jesus used with the paralytic (Mark 2), first forgiving his sins then healing him. We named our organization Four Friends International, after the four men who carried that paralytic and lowered him through the roof. Our motto of service became: "Pick up your corner of the cot."

A decade later we now operate three clinics in the Jalapa area. The clinic at Los Laureles was built in 2014 and began treating patients a year later. On the opposite side of town, in the rural village of Los Pinos, a second clinic was constructed and became operational in 2018. Both clinics are staffed by Guatemalans and provide free medical care and medicines Monday through Saturday of each week. The nurse of each clinic resides in an attached rear apartment.

Adjacent to the clinics are the two mission churches. At Los Laureles and Los Pinos, it is impossible to enter the clinic without noticing the church or to enter the church without seeing the clinic. The two are inseparably linked, both in proximity and purpose.





# RICHER THAN YOU THINK

By Randy Stewart

*- On behalf of my brothers and sisters in Christ in Guatemala -*

If you look at me now, you'd shed a tear,  
and you'd say a prayer for me;  
But beyond all the pain of my circumstance  
is something you can't see.

I am dressed in His righteousness, clothed in His love,  
washed in the fountain of grace,  
Sheltered under His wing, my debt paid on Calvary's tree;  
in Jesus, I'm richer than you think.

If you look at me now, my wardrobe so bare,  
my meager food and drink,  
You would not see the white robe I wear  
at Jesus' banquet feast.

I am dressed in His righteousness, clothed in His love,  
washed in the fountain of grace,  
Feasting on the Bread of Life,  
drinking the Living Water of Christ;  
in Jesus, I'm richer than you think.

If you look at me now from earth's point of view,  
I am the least of all;  
But things will be changed when, on heaven's shore,  
I hear my Savior call:

"Come, be dressed in My righteousness, clothed in My love,  
washed in the fountain of grace;  
Walk here on streets of pure gold, heir to a mansion untold."  
In Jesus, I'm richer than you think.

Richer, richer!  
I'm richer, so much richer!  
In Jesus, I have all things.

Two years ago we established the Four Wheels Clinic, our mobile unit, which travels to three mountain communities near Jalapa to provide ongoing care. Staffed by a nurse and a driver, this van carries medicines to the people of El Divisadero, Laguna del Pito, and El Charro each week. We are praying that God will use this mobile unit to plant seeds from which a new mountain church will grow.

All together, our stationary and mobile clinics treat over 1,500 patients each month, and more than 100,000 patient visits have been recorded since 2015. Included in this number are 20 infants from the city dump, to whom we supply diapers and infant supplies each month.

There are several ways that you, can "pick up your corner of the cot" to bring the sick to Jesus. You can add us to your prayer list. You can travel with us to Jalapa as a medical or church support volunteer. You can support us financially through gifts to Dawson. (Our church graciously provided funds for us at the end of 2023.) You can also spread the word to others about Four Friends International. Perhaps God will call them into service as clearly as He called me, and their lives may never be the same.



**Randy Stewart** became a member at Dawson eight years ago when he and Cathy, his wife of 46 years, moved to Birmingham to be near their two daughters and six grandchildren. A graduate of Samford University and the University of Alabama School of Medicine, he has been a hospital-based physician for 40 years. In addition, he is an ordained minister who has served as a music/worship minister in several north Alabama churches. Presently, he is the president of Four Friends International, a Dawson Life Group teacher, and a Sanctuary Choir tenor.



Dad



Me

Mom

# staying on my toes

By **Hannah Adams**  
Associate Minister to Children







Rachel

Lydia

My story begins like many others. I was born in Birmingham, AL, and I have lived here for all but four years of my life. My parents are both believers, and I grew up attending Oak Mountain Presbyterian Church. I have two younger sisters, Rachel and Lydia, and we are all two years apart. Our home was filled with a lot of girly things. We never played video games, but instead we loved to play pretend with our dolls and stuffed animals. We fought like all sisters do, but we were also very close.

Beginning with kindergarten, I attended the Westminster School at Oak Mountain and would remain there for the rest of my elementary, middle, and high school years. It was a sweet school with small classes and an education based in the Word of God. Westminster was a great fit for our family, and I am grateful to have grown up there.

*Our home was filled with a lot of girly things.*

When I was in the fifth grade, my mom began teaching elementary art at Westminster. It was so fun to be in her class and to learn more from her. My mom has always taught me and my sisters about art, and we loved drawing and painting together throughout our childhood. To this day, my mom continues to encourage my artistic side. She still teaches art at Westminster, and her faithfulness has shown me how a person can impact the lives of children for the glory of the Lord!

My dad has also taught me how to make a positive impact on children. My dad has worked in educational technology my whole life, and he instilled in me a deep love for learning and for helping others learn. That love for learning has worked well for me, since learning more about Jesus and helping *others* learn more about Jesus is what I've been called to do through ministry. My dad recently retired from his career in education, which he concluded as Chief Technology Officer at Vestavia City Schools. I'm not sure what's next for him, but I am sure that he will never stop learning.

When I was growing up, the most important thing to me was ballet. I really loved to dance! I had the privilege of dancing at Briarwood Ballet where I learned how to worship God through the art of dance. Ballet was where I was disciplined, where I learned to love Jesus, and where I learned that my body was meant to glorify the God who made it. The gift of dance has continued to bless me throughout my life—even now as I get to teach other young people at Dawson Ballet.

I was able to go on international and domestic mission trips to share the Gospel through dance.

It's amazing how many people who would never think to enter a church would come to see a dance performance! The lyrics of the songs we used for our dances made it possible for us to tell people about Jesus as we danced. These opportunities expanded my imagination on just how God might use my gifts and passions to serve Him.

I started believing in who Jesus was when I was in the first grade. Through Sunday School, conversations at home, school Bible lessons, and worship at ballet, my faith in Jesus grew. I began to truly love God and wanted to devote my whole life to serving Him out of gratitude for all that He did to save me from my sin. In the third grade, I publicly professed my faith in Jesus and joined my local church. It was so special to share with my church family what God had been doing in my heart!

*Ballet was my life.*







Westminster High School

## *But as I prayed and waited, the Lord made my path clear.*

As time passed, I began to wonder how God would use me to build His Kingdom. Through mission opportunities at ballet and church, I started sharing my faith with nonbelievers. I also was given the opportunity to disciple other believers who were younger than me. I loved sharing my testimony and teaching others about the Bible. As I learned more about God's Word, I became even more hungry to share the Good News with everyone around me. Still, I had no idea that God was calling me to vocational ministry in the local church.

I saw the needs of people within the city and the community, and I was eager to see God meet those needs through me and my church family.

During my junior year of college, the COVID-19 pandemic began. That was a difficult season for everyone, me included, but it turned out to be an essential time of growth for my faith. I moved back home to Birmingham for about six months and was able to spend precious time with my family. During that time, I was also given an opportunity to serve at a church in a new context.

The summer before COVID, I had interned at Lakeside Baptist Church in Birmingham, helping them to establish a new Young Adults and College Ministry. It was a wonderful summer filled with community and learning more about the Lord. We all grew in our faith as we experienced gospel-centered friendships. This was also the first opportunity I had been given to teach Bible studies to adults. I soon discovered that I loved doing this! I loved reading Scripture, studying it deeply, and teaching what the Lord had taught me to others. This is when I realized that God was calling me to vocational ministry. I wanted to devote my life to teaching the Bible to people, both inside and outside the church.

Before long, my high school graduation approached, and I had to decide what my next step would be. Through a long discernment process, I knew that God was calling me to pursue a degree in secondary English education at the University of Alabama. Going to college was nothing like the experience I had at a small private Christian high school. Thankfully, the Lord opened my eyes to more of who He was at every turn. I was able to meet with people who did not know Jesus and share His love with them. This happened not just through words but through living life alongside them. I also found a wonderful church home away from home at Calvary Baptist Church.

During COVID, I spent a lot of time with the community at Lakeside, and I began to think about what I would do after college. I had few examples of women in ministry, and I didn't even know where to begin. But as I prayed and waited, the Lord made my path clear. On what felt like a whim, and what I now know



First day at Beeson

Blooming at Beeson

I started serving in their youth ministry during my freshman year of college. I was blessed to be at a place where I could grow spiritually and be discipled while getting to minister to middle school and high school students. It was such a gift to see the students grow into young men and women of God. My years at college were a time of rapid growth, personally and spiritually. I learned so much about God's Word and what it meant to actually put it into practice.





was the Holy Spirit, I toured Beeson Divinity School. Many trusted mentors and friends had attended Beeson, and I couldn't imagine that I would ever have the privilege of attending myself. But God made a way.

After graduation, I knew that Beeson was my next step, and I also knew I wanted to serve in a local church. Throughout my journey, I had spent a lot of time with kids, but I had not specifically thought about Children's Ministry. Until one day I read a job description for a part time job at Cahaba Park Church in Birmingham. It was then that I realized that the Lord had perfectly prepared me for this job, and one I could do while I was in seminary. I met with the leaders at Cahaba Park and began my work in Children's Ministry.

For the first two and a half years of seminary, I served on staff at Cahaba Park Church. Between weekly Sunday School classes, fourth and fifth grade Bible studies, summer fellowships, and Vacation Bible School, I learned so much about what faithful children's ministries look like. And I fell in love with ministering to children and their families. Childhood is such a crucial time in a person's life in learning the fundamentals of the Christian faith. So much of what I know and love about Jesus now, I learned when I was a child.

Beeson has also made a profound impact upon my life and my ministry. I have learned church history, theology, and Scripture in ways far deeper than I had ever imagined. Beeson has made me into a lifelong learner. I know that the rest of my life will be a process of learning more and more about God and His Word until He brings me home. What's more, I have



The BIG day

*It is a privilege to invite children to follow Jesus.*

All In 4 Him

been able to deepen my counseling skills through my electives and through the personal discipleship I've experienced at Beeson. I have found forever friends and mentors who have transformed my life and my relationship with Jesus. I also met my husband at Beeson!

On our first day of classes, we sat together and became fast friends. And not long after, we became study partners. Over the next few months, we began to realize that the Lord was bringing us together as a couple, and I knew that Spencer would be my husband. One of my greatest privileges in life is getting to serve the Kingdom of God alongside Spencer Adams. We were engaged in February of 2023, and we were married on December 16, 2023. Though we have only been married a few months, Spencer has already made me a better minister and follower of Jesus through his love and support. We look forward to a lifetime of ministry together!

In October of 2023, the Lord opened the door for me to serve at Dawson. It was immediately evident that Dawson was a church that loved children! I have been so kindly embraced by the Dawson Family and have already learned and grown so much during my time here. I am truly blessed to be able to share the Gospel with our Dawson Kids each week and to play a small part in their faith journeys.



**Hannah Adams** is a graduate of The University of Alabama with a degree in Secondary English Language Arts. Hannah grew up loving to dance and has taught ballet at Dawson for over two years. Hannah loves to bake, read, and spend time with family and friends. She and her husband, Spencer, graduated from Beeson Divinity School in spring 2024.

Young Professionals at Cahaba Park



CHASING



THE ECLIPSE

By **Keith Vinson** Director of Information Systems



It started in August of 2017. Our staff had just come in from the North Parking Lot at Dawson after viewing the solar eclipse of 2017—at least what we could see of it as the path of totality moved north of us across Tennessee. With our 90% coverage, we had turned it into a Homewood neighborhood “eclipse party,” with shadow boxes set up, welding helmets and eclipse glasses ready, and lots of questions answered. I was struck with how bright it remained with just that little sliver of sun showing in Birmingham.

My daughter called me from South Carolina, where she was visiting at her in-laws, who lived right in the path of totality. “Dad, you would not believe it!”, she said with excitement. “You just have to see it in person.” Later that evening, another friend called me, with a similar excited report. That night, my wife, Miriam, and I vowed that we would try to see the next one in 2024.

Fast forward six years, to August of 2023. Since COVID, we were ready to travel and wanted to see some of America. The 2024 Eclipse would be a great option. We charted the path of totality using the tools available on the internet websites and looked for likely spots that were within driving distance in a single day, 8 to 10 hours one way. Miriam started looking online for hotels, and we quickly discovered that we weren’t the only ones planning for the eclipse. In Texas and Arkansas, hotel rates were anywhere from two to four times regular prices, and some hotels were charging as much as \$1000 per night for a room! Discouraged at the potential costs, we looked further north along the path. Miriam found a hotel in Dayton, Ohio, with rooms available. The price was slightly higher than usual, but much more reasonable than the ones to the south. We decided we would take a chance and booked a room for two nights, Sunday April 7, and Monday April 8, 2024, the day of the eclipse.

Doing more research later, we realized that our chance of seeing the eclipse and not being blocked by bad weather and clouds was pretty low. All the models and historical weather data pointed to Texas as the logical place to go, which probably accounted for the higher prices.

In January 2024, I had an idea. Dayton was just in the edge of the path of totality; they would have only about one and half minutes for the total eclipse. I wanted to be closer to the middle of the path, and to see it for the entire four minutes. I also wanted to avoid crowded roads and venues, to “get out into the country, away from town.” I thought about where we could go safely, and I seized on the idea of setting

up my equipment in a church parking lot. After all, we had a great time in with fellow staff members, church members, and neighbors in 2017. A perusal of the totality map showed several promising towns near Dayton that were close to the centerline of the path. I then searched online for “Baptist churches in western Ohio” and found a few.

Greenville Baptist Church. Hmm, Greenville, Ohio was pretty close to the centerline of the path. I looked at a satellite image. It was a tiny building, but it had a nice parking lot and several acres of what looked like a pasture between it and the road. It reminded me of my home church, Robinsonville Baptist Church, a tiny little church in a farming community in South Alabama. GBC was located on Children’s Home Road on the outskirts of town. I recalled that we had two staff meetings at the Alabama Baptist Children’s Home headquarters less than a mile from my house in recent years. What a “coincidence!” I found an email address for contact, and a phone number on their website and decided to go for it. I emailed the church, explaining that Miriam and I wanted to watch the eclipse from their parking lot with a lot of equipment, and asked if we could have permission to set up there. Oh, and by the way, was the church planning on doing anything related to the eclipse?

A couple of weeks passed with no answer to my query. I decided to call the number on their website and got an answering machine with details on Sunday service times. I left a message. It looked like I needed to start looking for another church or another location. Another week passed. Suddenly, there was an email in my mailbox. “Yes, we are planning an eclipse party; you are welcome to join us.” No name, no signature. I wrote back immediately, declaring our delight and intention to be there.

We began to plan the driving part of the trip. We would leave on Friday morning, drive to southwest Virginia to visit old friends we had not seen in a couple of years, then on Sunday, drive from there to Dayton, OH, crossing through the Appalachian range through West Virginia, and then across southern Ohio. We would spend the night in Dayton, head out to Greenville on Monday morning, eclipse day, get back to the hotel to rest that night, and then drive home to Birmingham on Tuesday.

On Sunday afternoon, Dayton came over the horizon, visible through the cornfields. In the lobby of the hotel, they had a US map with thumbtacks for folks who were visiting for the eclipse, to mark their hometowns; there were thumbtacks





from all over the U.S. I heard the desk clerk answering the phone, "No, ma'am, I am sorry, we are completely booked for this evening." The hotel was completely full, and more folks were arriving. Our room on the third floor faced due south, and we realized that we could have watched the eclipse from the window of the hotel room; our original plan was that if worse came to worst, we could at least see the eclipse from the hotel parking lot. But God had better plans for us than just hanging out in a hotel parking lot!

I was so excited that I woke up several times during the night (Miriam later told me that she had also been up several times, too.) Finally, dawn came, with crystal clear skies after a night of showers, and we got ready and went to the hotel dining room for breakfast. Miriam talked to some folks at an adjacent table who were from California, who asked her where she was from (based on her accent); they expressed surprise that we would travel up from Alabama to Dayton—why did we not go to Texas or Arkansas?

We loaded the car and headed out for Greenville. The GPS said it would be about an hour. As we moved through Dayton and away from the city, the traffic was not too bad—heavy, but moving. The two-lane highway to Greenville had a speed limit of 55 mph, and we saw lots of police and deputy sheriff cars. Apparently, they were expecting a large turnout of eclipse viewers.

We got to Greenville, we first drove to the church, but no one was there at 11:00 a.m. Nearby were three large, white electric windmills, visible for miles in every direction. We took a tour through Greenville, and I took some photos of the historic downtown; it had been restored and was picturesque with old storefronts, new sidewalks, churches, and the county courthouse. Leaving downtown, we looked for the electric windmills and made our way back to the church.

There were two cars in the lot, so we drove down the long gravel road from the street to the church and then parked. Miriam headed for the front door, with me in tow, and we met the pastor, Tim Pol, as we started into the entrance. We introduced ourselves and he instantly made the connection with the previous emails and phone messages (he had sent the reply to us). He directed us downstairs where they were setting up in their Fellowship Hall for a meal. It would not be a proper Baptist church gathering without food, and there was lots of good food! We brought an apple pie that we had picked up on the way. More people began to arrive, and we met several

more folks, including the pastor's wife, Katie, and their three boys. Pastor Pol was born in Cambodia and had moved to Minnesota when he was a child. He served eight years in the U.S. Marines in the Infantry, and he had tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. After the Marines, he felt the desire to learn more about the Bible and enrolled in a theological seminary. During this process, he felt God's call for him to be a pastor, and Greenville Baptist Church called him in 2020 to serve there, right at the start of COVID-19.

The folks at the church welcomed us and made us feel right at home. During lunch, we sat at a table with several other couples who were about our age. One couple had moved to be close to grandchildren; one couple were brought to the area by a sales job, and another couple had spent all their lives in Ohio. As we talked and swapped stories, we realized we were among friends who were strong believers. One question we were asked often, "How did you two wind up here?" At another table, a group of children ate quickly and excused themselves; they were ready to be outside playing, like all children everywhere.

Greenville Baptist Church reminded me so much of the church I grew up in, not in the way that it looked, but by the people we encountered. The church building was a simple two-story structure, with the upper-level housing the Sanctuary, and the lower level the educational spaces and Fellowship Hall with adjoining kitchen. Outside, there was a volleyball net and a corn hole game set up. Later, after lunch, the whole church gathered for games as we waited for the big event to begin.

I started setting up my equipment right after lunch. I had brought multiple tripods with us, so it took a little time. My spotting scope was the best for observing the sun, with its home-made solar filter, and I had an eyepiece adapter for it that allowed me to photograph through it with my iPhone. I also had a camera positioned on the side of the parking lot, aimed to record video of the group's reactions during the eclipse. Miriam also had her iPhone, and she took some really good photos. My biggest regret was that I should have brought more cameras!

After the volleyball game, folks started to drift into the parking lot where we had set up. I met another member of the community who had set up his own equipment to record, and we traded notes about our intentions and setups. We watched the sun through the filtered spotting scope and the filtered binoculars as the moon began to eat away at the sun's disk.



Excitement in the parking lot. Pastor Tim and Katie Pol with their three boys Daro, Kila and Matthias. Keith back at Dawson.



An older member of the congregation was in her wheelchair, working hard to see anything with her pair of eclipse glasses, which was a task combining them with her eyeglasses. After I connected my iPhone to the spotting scope, anyone behind the scope could see the image of the sun on the screen, and that became a focal point for the group. Many folks walked up and took a photo of my iPhone screen, and the lady in the wheelchair could now watch the progress of the moon covering the sun easily without using her eclipse glasses.

The moment of totality arrived: 3:08 p.m. local time. As the sun disappeared behind the moon and darkness fell, a collective murmur began to grow, and when the black disk of the moon appeared superimposed on the sun, a cry of delight and awe arose. Almost immediately, we could see a Baily's bead appear on the bottom of the moon's disk, like a purple jewel (Baily's beads are light spots from the sun bent by the gravity of the moon that pass through valleys on the edge of the moon's disk). Some stars and Venus appeared; the night sky was visible directly overhead, but light from the sunlit clouds on our horizon (outside of the spot of the moon's shadow on the earth in which we stood) gave an eerie 360 degree "after-sundown" effect.

The sun is around 865,000 miles in diameter, the moon, a mere 2,159 miles in diameter; the moon orbits an average of 239,000 miles from earth, while earth orbits the sun at an average of 93,000,000 miles; yet, because of this complicated orbital ballet, both moon and sun appear to be nearly the same diameter to an observer on earth, so that the (small) moon can neatly cover the (giant) sun in an eclipse. What a wonderful "coincidence" this is!

During the eclipse, the corona (the edges of the sun) stood out magnificently, beautiful, white, wispy, and delicate, stretching out into space nearly the same width of the black moon all around it. Some parts of it must extend more than a million miles into space from the surface of the sun. The twilight was eerie. Night security lights came on in the neighborhood; birds roosted in trees and bushes, yet called out to each other, seeking assurance in this short "night." It was brighter than a full moonlit night, where you can still only see in black and white. In this twilight, you could see color.

The four minutes passed quickly; I scurried between telescope, binoculars, and my DSLR that was recording the crowd as they watched. A group of ladies began a chorus of "My God, you are my God, and I will ever praise You." We stared upwards, drawn to the jet-black disk of the moon and its stark contrast to the sun behind it. Then, a bright spot appeared and began to grow, the "diamond ring." "Solar glasses back on!" the parents yelled to the kids. And totality had passed: 3:12 PM. The sunlight returned and grew brighter. I looked away to the northeast, and the moving moon's shadow made a dark horizon in that direction, very much like a retreating

storm. We all commented on how chilly it had become, and now warmth was returning.

The location had been perfect, nearly in the center of the path of totality; the weather had been very nice, considering that it had rained the previous night. (On Tuesday, we were wet all day as we drove back to Alabama, receiving the storm front that had swept across Texas on Monday.) I texted friends in Texas, who were able to watch the eclipse right up to the point of totality, only to have a cloud come in and block the view for the entirety of the rest of the show. Miriam and I both reflected on our decision to come to Ohio. We could've been the ones who were disappointed: We had braced ourselves for traveling all that way for nothing. But God granted us a blessing. Not only did we enjoy beautiful conditions for the observation of an eclipse, but we also made new friends with a congregation of fellow Baptist believers.

The joy of fellowship and a shared experience with new friends was something we will remember for the rest of our lives.

Miriam gathered information on how to contact folks so that we could share our photos and videos with them, and I began to pack up our gear. The other photographer was going to stay and finish his series of photos to get a complete set from the very start of the eclipse to the very end. We hugged our new friends, and we drove away with a profound sense of happiness and blessedness.

This entire trip was divinely constructed, one of those God moments that make you appreciate the goodness of the Father, in how every element had come together. We had vowed to try to see a total eclipse, and had prayed for a chance to do so, and God blessed us in how He made it all happen. Just like all those orbital "coincidences" that led to the eclipse, we experienced "coincidences" that were really the hand of God working. The decision to go to Dayton; the idea to set up at a church parking lot; the desire to move to a location closer to maximum totality; and the "discovery" of Greenville Baptist Church, were clearly the work of the Holy Spirit in retrospect. I was reminded of the blessing of Paul given to the Ephesians in chapter 3: "Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."



**Keith Vinson** has been Director of Information Systems at Dawson since 2000. Before that, he worked as an electrical engineer, software developer, and systems test engineer. He is happily married to Miriam and has two wonderful daughters, Jen and Caroline, and four wonderful grandchildren: Mia, Kai, Ryleigh Beth, and Carter. His hobbies include singing in the choir as a tenor, metal-working, ham radio, motorcycling, building telescopes, and "just tinkering."





# EMPTY SPACES & Full Hearts

By **Lainee Stidham**  
Spiritual Development & Women's Ministry Assistant

## HAVE WE CONVINCED OURSELVES THAT FULL IS POSITIVE & EMPTY IS NEGATIVE?

Like with the glass half full or half empty analogy. Any chance we've gotten it a little backwards in some areas of our lives? We fill, and fill, and fill some more, worried that someone might see that we're empty of time and energy, but we try to appear filled no matter the costs. As moms, have we applied this process to our calendars? To our school years? To our summers? Every year there seems to be more than the last year...more full. But is more "full" always a good thing?

I substitute teach in a local school system a couple of days a week, and it's such a gift. For these teenagers, spring is a great time, but it's also an awful time of year. I see these kids trying their

hardest to make it in life. They're trying to make their parents proud, prove to their teachers they deserve the good grade, and win the favor and confidence of their friends.

Exams, proms, play-offs, SGA elections, driving tests, end of year fundraisers, performances, tryouts, spring training for fall sports, registration for classes next year, summer interviews for jobs... the list goes on and on. These students haven't even closed the chapter of spring yet, and they're already one foot into summer and fall.

Life is great. Life is full. Life is **a lot**.

I recently asked what would help them to end the school year well? Some of their answers might surprise you.

One of the most telling was that they needed/wanted some empty space in their schedule. Empty space.

Using the water-in-the-glass analogy again—full is good, and full to the top is even better. But that's not what our teenagers are saying. Isn't that interesting?

I think I agree. Having some empty space makes room for opportunities. During seasons that ramp up and are super busy for families of all ages, empty spaces offer us permission to slow down when we realize that we need the rest. Many times, we interpret "no room" as a signal to pull up our bootstraps and bear the burden at all costs—even when we'll be disappointed with the results.





Okay, I can see that teenagers need empty space, but I'd even go as far as to say that children of all ages might need the same thing. As we wrap up this school year, our family of six will finish a chapter in seventh, third, second, and our final lap in the first grade. Honestly, I can tell that even they want space. They want quiet. They want rest.

This became crystal clear to me a couple of weeks ago. My third grader is gifted in athletics, so when the annual track meet popped up on my radar, I immediately registered him to participate. A short time later I realized that the Collide Musical was also scheduled for the same day.

"It's fine... we can do this."

I emailed the coach, got him signed up for the earliest events of the day, and kept on truckin'. I was already making plans in mind on how to accomplish this task. I would pack the bags and haul everything to the high school so he could compete. Then, we would race to the car, get to the church, change clothes and freshen up, all in time for the musical. The day was going to be a whirlwind, but no one would miss out. My kids would be thrilled with dinner-in-a-cup from Smoothie King, and all would be well. As everyone bounded into my car after school that day, almost immediately my third grader announced, "Mommy, I don't want to do the track meet today. I already told my PE coach I won't be there." Hmmm.

Something must've happened at school. His competitive edge is too fierce. He also gets impatient with haughtiness from others his age. I imagined that a PE game had gone wrong or something happened at recess that he wasn't in the mood for at the track meet. I asked him to please tell me what happened. His answer blew me away.

"I'm going to feel really rushed and I'm going to get to the musical all sweaty and out of breath and I won't be able to sing well or do my best. I just want to skip it so we can have a good afternoon instead."

Okay. How did this third grader learn what I still have trouble doing four decades into my life? I make commitments, and I bow to the commitment, at all costs, no matter what or who suffers to make sure I do what I said I would do.

Yes, it's very important to uphold commitments, but ultimately, it's more important to steward myself, and my family, well. Sometimes that means backing out of something when it no longer serves the purpose it was intended to serve. This track meet was supposed to be fun. I'm sure it would've been great on another day, at another time. However, the musical was an incredible worship experience for all of us, and I'm so glad that my son had the perception to take care of his responsibilities to give his best. His 9-year-old heart was an example to me.

As parents, this is a great reminder to keep having those conversations with our kids—even when they don't have a lot to say. Ask them if they're happy with what they're investing their time in. Ask them if there's anything they want to stop. Ask them if there's anything they want to add but haven't had the time (or confidence) to pursue. Then help them with that. Before we know it, those elementary aged-kids will be graduating seniors. Helping them understand the value of time and how to use it well is a valuable life skill.

Ultimately, any empty space that you are able to create for yourself and your family is a gift. Reading on the front porch, laying on the hammock, strolling through the woods, whatever that looks like for you. Use it as a time of rest and restoration. My experience has always been that using time for Bible Study, prayer, or worship will leave you refreshed and "filled" in all the very best ways. My hope for our family this summer is for more empty space—with a little less juggling, but a lot more Jesus.

Jesus said to them, "Come away with me. Let us go alone to a quiet place and rest for a while." (Mark 6:31)



**Laine Stidham** and her husband, Judson, have four children, Judson Jr, Lucas, Georgia Kate, and Zachary. Dawson entered their story the day after their oldest son was born. She is still amazed at how relentlessly faithful God continues to be in their lives.





# KALEB LYTLE

## EAGLE SCOUT / DAWSON CHURCH TROOP 83

Kaleb Lytle achieved the rank of Eagle Scout on December 14, 2023. He began his scouting career as a 7th grader. Since joining Troop 83, Kaleb has earned 25 merit badges and held numerous leadership positions, including Senior Patrol Leader, Assistant Senior Patrol Leader, Librarian, and Instructor.

For his Eagle project, he improved the trail system at McCallum Park in Vestavia Hills, Alabama. McCallum Park includes approximately two miles of trails and is used by the community for walking and mountain biking. Kaleb has been riding the trails at the park for several years and chose the location for his project as a way to give back to the City of Vestavia. There were multiple areas of the trail system that needed work so that people could enjoy the full potential of the park.



For the project, Kaleb led the building of two bridges over wash areas to create loop trails accessible by foot or mountain bike. One bridge was 8 feet long, and the other bridge was 16 feet long. The crew also walked the trail system and trimmed, clipped, or cut away obstructions. He completed the project in October 2023 with the help of his family, his friends, fellow Scouts, and adult leaders.

Kaleb is a sophomore at Vestavia Hills High School this year. His parents are Michael and Karmin Lytle, and Luke, his brother, is also a member of Troop 83. Kaleb and his family attend Dawson where Kaleb is actively involved in Dawson's Student Ministry and the Chapel Choir. Kaleb also plays varsity lacrosse for Vestavia and plays club lacrosse for the Birmingham Bandits Lacrosse Club and the Southern Lacrosse Alliance. Congratulations, Kaleb, on this major accomplishment!



# Peachy Keen

By Amy Turnbow  
Director of Hospitality

If you know me, you know that peaches are my absolute favorite fruit. I can never get enough of their fresh flavor. It simply would not be summertime without them. In our family, you MUST stop and get two baskets of fresh peaches on the way to the beach. And you MUST stop and get two more on the way home. As soon as the sweet ones start coming in each year, I meet up with my friend, Mr. Graham, so I can get two more boxes to freeze and can. These three recipes are some of my favorites. Peaches—it simply isn't summer without them!



## Peach Freezer Jam

- 6 large fresh peaches, peeled and diced (3 ½ cups when diced)
- 1 box Sure-Jell pectin
- 1 ½ cups sugar
- 3 Tbls lemon juice
- 4 lidded containers that hold 1 cup each

Wash and dry containers. Heat a large pot of water to boiling. In a large bowl, make an ice water bath. Drop peaches carefully into boiling water for 1 minute. Remove peaches and place in ice water bath. When peaches are cool enough to touch, skin should slide right off. Dice peaches into a very large bowl and remove the pits.

In a separate bowl, mix sugar and pectin until well blended. Add lemon juice and sugar mixture to the peaches. Stir fruit, juice, and sugar together for 5 to 6 minutes or until no longer grainy and the mixture has thickened. Pour peach jam into the containers and seal completely. Allow to sit and rest on the counter for 24 hours before freezing.

## Peach Salsa

- 2 Tbls fresh chopped cilantro
- 1 fresh minced jalapeno
- 1 fresh lime, juiced
- 3 fresh peaches, peeled and diced
- ½ small red onion, small diced
- 1 fresh Roma tomato, diced and seeded
- Kosher salt & fresh cracked pepper to taste



In a 4-cup mixing bowl, add all produce ingredients. Toss gently until well combined. Salt and pepper to taste. Serve salsa over grilled or smoked pork or chicken. Or with cream cheese and crackers for a beach balcony snack.

## Peach Cobbler

- 8-10 ripe peaches
- 1 cup sugar + 2 Tbls.
- 4 oz butter
- 2 Tbls cornstarch or flour
- 1 refrigerated pie crust
- Cool whip or vanilla ice cream



Peel, pit and slice peaches into a 2-quart oven safe casserole dish. Sprinkle with 1 cup sugar and cornstarch. Cut cold butter over the peaches and sugar mixture. Top with pie crust, making sure to completely cover the top of the casserole dish. Press seams together if needed to seal the filling under the pie shell. Sprinkle top with remaining 2 Tbls. sugar.

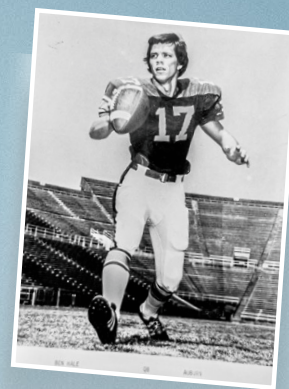
Bake at 350 degrees until top crust is brown and the filling is bubbling up around the edges. Approx. 45-60 minutes. When spooning up, add cool whip or vanilla ice cream to the top of the hot cobbler. Enjoy summertime in a bowl!!





# TEN MINUTE TALK

A Series of Rapid-Fire Questions With Dawson Staff Members



Circa 1979

**Ben Hale** is a man of many talents. As Dawson's Evangelism & Missions Pastor since 2000, he has faithfully led Dawson's Missions Team with a fierce determination and enormous enthusiasm, along with an easygoing and kind disposition. And as a devoted husband, father, and grandfather, his dry wit and sense of humor always leaves us wanting more. But did you know that he harbors a love for Taylor Swift songs and hates glitter? Read on to learn more!

### Where did you grow up?

I am from Pine Apple, Alabama, but my teen years were in Jasper.

### Perfect way to start the day?

Coffee. I drink one or two cups. I'm pretty groggy in the morning.

**What was the best part about being a kid?** Playing and enjoying life. Family. I had a really good childhood.

**What food would you never eat again?** Brussels sprouts.

### What's an activity you like to do with your grandchildren?

There are four of them, and they're all different ages. I like to join them in whatever they want to play. We have two playrooms at our house. One has baby dolls in it, and one has a kitchen.

**Favorite board game?** Battleship. Because it's my grandson's favorite.

### Biggest pet peeve?

Glitter. It's permanent. You can't ever get rid of glitter.

### Rumor has it that you're a "Swiftly." What's your favorite song (or songs)?

"Shake It Off." I like her early stuff. Wait, where did you hear that?

### Worst style choice you ever made?

Platform shoes. I remember buying some burgundy and gray platform shoes and going to church thinking, "I am looking good!"

**Do you have any pets?** We have a small pound puppy named Rosie.

**Favorite place to vacation?** The beach.

**Are you messy?** I'm probably the opposite of messy. I don't like clutter.

### Last movie you watched?

*The Boys in the Boat*. It's a sports movie set in the 1930s.

### What's your best memory from your time as an Auburn quarterback?

The day I signed my scholarship at my parents' house.

### Where did you meet your wife?

At the Baptist Student Center at Auburn.

### What made you interested in missions?

I attended a missions week in North Carolina when I was 14 years old. There was a worship program that had a picture with two hands embracing a globe that was so memorable to me that I saved it. I still have it. My wife and I even recreated that photo at our wedding. The speaker at that event was later one of my professors at seminary.

### What's the most impactful mission trip you've been on?

Akot, South Sudan or Dawson's first medical mission project.

### How many countries have you visited?

16 (plus 3 more if you count just stopping at an airport.)

### What's something exciting that's happened to you lately?

My wife and I planned to go on our first international mission trip together, but it was cancelled at the last minute. It's never worked out for us to go together before now. Maybe next time.

### You've had a Doctor of Ministry degree for almost 30 years. Does anyone call you Dr. Hale?

Only Alice Harris.

### Outdoor activities you enjoy?

I like mowing the grass and working in my yard. I like going on walks with my wife. I like going to my grandson's baseball games and practices.

### Scariest thing you've ever done?

I am not a thrill seeker. I've been to some places on mission trips where I probably should have been afraid, but I never was. I'm not a fearful person. The scariest movie I ever saw was *The Birds*.

### What's on your cheeseburger?

All the way, no tomato.

**Favorite candy?** Almond Joy.

**Do you play any instruments?** No.

### You have a large collection of keys. Where are they from?

I found those keys in the attic of my father's general store in an old roll top desk. I was always fascinated by them.

### If you could time travel, what time would you visit?

The day before Jesus comes back. If you get here the day before he comes back, you don't have to wait around. Or the day I met my wife or the days we adopted our children.

**If tomato is a fruit, is ketchup a smoothie?** I hate tomatoes.

**What's the last thing you bought?** A 27-inch baseball bat.

### Favorite kind of music?

1970s rock. And Chris Tomlin is my favorite artist.

**Favorite 80s movie?** *Top Gun*.

**What superpower would you like to have?** Wisdom. I'd like to be exceptionally wise.

**TV show you would like to be on?** *The Andy Griffith Show* or *NCIS*.

**Who do you admire?** My father.

**What makes you smile?** My grandkids.





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# CHAPEL CHOIR HOME CONCERT

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SANCTUARY