

FEBRUARY 2025

Together

AT DAWSON

2024
AT A GLANCE

MEET
**KATHLEEN
BASS**

ASSOCIATE MINISTER
TO SPECIAL NEEDS

**FAITHFUL
BEGINNINGS**

A Snapshot Of
Dawson's Early Years

A BRIEF
HISTORY OF
**DAWSON'S
CHOIRS**

**100
YEARS**

Celebrating
God's Faithfulness
at Dawson



FAITHFUL
TOGETHER

{ Moreover, it is required of stewards }
that they be found faithful.

1 Corinthians 4:2



COMMITMENT
DAY IS **MARCH 16**

Together

AT DAWSON



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ON THE COVER: Mrs J.T. Callaway in the Fellowship Hall (center) at Dawson's Thanksgiving dinner in 1948.



dawsonchurch.org/AfterThoughts

WATCH LIVE
live.dawsonchurch.org



JOIN US

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

From



Dr. David Eldridge
Senior Pastor

Pastor David

Dear Church Family,

Not long ago, Danielle and I found ourselves diving into a "rabbit hole" of old family photographs and videos from about 15 years ago. It's amazing how much has changed in what feels like such a short span of time. There's a certain joy and nostalgia in looking back—a wonderful reminder of all the moments that have shaped and defined our family.

As spring approaches, our church family will gather to celebrate a remarkable milestone: 100 years of worship, ministry, and mission. Our history comprises a vast photo album full of reminders of God's unwavering leadership and the legacy of faithfulness that has defined our church family for this past century.

In the fourth chapter of Joshua, we find a powerful story of how looking back inspired God's people to move forward. After God miraculously parted the Jordan River, Joshua instructed the Israelites to take twelve stones from the riverbed and set them up as a memorial. These stones served as a tangible reminder (a photo of sorts) of God's faithfulness and power. Joshua proclaimed, "In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever" (Joshua 4:6-7).

For our church, this last century of ministry is marked by similar "stones of remembrance," milestones that testify to God's provision and providence. It is good to look back in the photo album of our church to see those reminders of where we've traveled through the decades. This issue of our *Together at Dawson Magazine* gives us a taste of those photos from the past that inspire us to move into His future. From our founding members to a short history of our musical heritage, each of these stories is a stone that God has graciously given us to remind us of His steadfast love.

But just as the Israelites did not stop at the Jordan, neither do we stop here. The stones of remembrance are not merely markers of where we've been; they are catalysts for where we are going. They remind us that the same God who parted the Jordan River is leading us into new opportunities for ministry and growth. As we celebrate our 100th anniversary, we honor the legacy of those who came before us by committing ourselves to continue to carry the Gospel into the next century of our church's future—a future where we are being called to be **Faithful Together** in the stewardship of our Sanctuary renovation.

So, as we approach these exciting days ahead as a church, let's take time to reflect on Dawson's rich history. Look back at the photographs, listen to the stories, and remember the faithfulness of God. But let these memories also inspire you to dream boldly about what's ahead. Let us build on the foundation of those who have gone before us, trusting that God's provision in the past assures us of His presence in the future.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Eldridge". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, looping "D" at the beginning and a long, sweeping tail at the end.

Pastor David



Life Group Stories

By Loretta Smith

Our family joined Dawson in July 1966. We each attended Sunday School classes for our age group for a year. My husband, Wayne, attended a men's class, and I attended a lady's class, both in the same department. Then, in 1967, Betty Pittman, our Education Director, asked Wayne if he would be the director of the Adult One department (Young Adults) and asked me if I would teach one of the women's classes. We both agreed to take on the new roles and served alongside the other teachers in that department.

We worked all year long trying to get young couples to come to Sunday School. They had many excuses: one of many was they didn't want to be separated into different classes. A typical statement might be, "My husband is a Methodist, or he doesn't want to go in a class where he doesn't know anyone." Our outreach efforts (we visited, wrote cards, etc.) did not seem to reach many people. We decided to have a meeting with Betty to get some advice. Her suggestion was for us to go to the Ridgecrest Conference Center in North Carolina and see if we could learn any ideas that might help.

We took the family and went to Ridgecrest Conference Center that summer. Wayne took the course for directors. I took a course for teachers. My teacher was Peter Ray Jones. He had some connection with Dawson, and so his name was familiar to me. On the first day, he talked about how people expected other people to look and act at that time, and that future generations would not fit the same mold. And he said that we, as Baptists, needed to get ready for that change. Then he asked the question, "Have any of you tried having a class when the young couple can be in the same class together? We then discussed the advantages and disadvantages. Each day, I would share with Wayne all the information that I had learned in class. By the end of the week, we were both sold on the idea of trying a couple's class at Dawson. Now, we had to sell Betty Pittman. And we did!

At the beginning of the new church year, we began a class for young couples and had 30 prospects. The church had purchased an old house near the campus. They took out some partitions in the house so we would have enough room for a class, and that's where our class met. Years later, that house was replaced by the first missionary house.

Wayne and I did team teaching, and we taught this class a little differently. To prepare, we both studied all week, and then on Saturday, we worked together to see which one wanted to take what part of the lesson, introduction, Scripture, and closing. On Sundays, we had the couples sit in a circle so that everyone could be seen. We had a kitchen in the house, and on the first Sunday of the month, we brought food for lunch and had fellowship. Often, we'd invite the class into our home for additional fellowship. By the end of the year, we had 100 attendees on our roll.

We also had several non-Sunday activities. We'd take the church bus and go to nearby parks. We played volleyball on Wednesdays after the service, and we even had an overnight retreat, with activities planned by the young people. At that time, all classes were promoted each new church year in the fall. Our class was promoted, and so we started a new class. Soon, other classes decided to become a class for couples, and we've had them ever since.

Leading Dawson's first couples' class was a great blessing for my family. We loved every couple and thank the Lord for each of them. This special time for learning and fellowship was a wonderful way to start a marriage and their new life together.



Loretta Smith has been a Dawson member for almost 60 years. Throughout that time, she has served in many areas of the church, including Life Group Leader, Missionary House Team, and the Dawsonaires. She has also served on multiple mission projects.



GATEWAY TO GOD'S KINGDOM

By Tom Thompson

Being in Dawson's Sanctuary brings back wonderful memories of key life moments that have occurred here. For me and my wife, Glenda, many of those memories center around our grandson, Andrew. In this Sanctuary, Andrew was dedicated as a baby, made his public profession of faith, was baptized, participated in KidLife, worshipped during DNOW, played the violin in Dawson Music Academy recitals, and sang with the Chapel Choir and Chapel Ensemble. Today, he plays in the orchestra.

Maybe you have memories similar to mine, such as walking the aisle to publicly accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, baby dedications, baptisms, choir concerts, KidLife worship events with balloons in the air, DNOWs with hundreds of students praising God, and Candlelight services. Happy memories like weddings, or maybe more somber ones like memorial services for loved ones who have passed. Those memories may be about yourself, your children, or your grandchildren.

Many of us are thinking a lot about the Sanctuary right now because of the upcoming renovation. I have been very privileged to be involved in renovation planning and primarily with the **Faithful Together** effort. This has given me a glimpse into the work of the Ad Hoc Team that developed

the Sanctuary Renovation project. It is no secret that it has been a long process to finally get to where we are. Hundreds, maybe thousands, of details had to be decided. Everything from crucial design criteria, all the way to the colors that will be used on the displays you will see around the Dawson campus. No detail has been overlooked.

Details are important, but this project is not about details. Throughout this process, we have been reminded about the history of this building and the role it has played in the lives of Dawson families. In his **Faithful Together** kickoff video, Pastor David spoke of the legacy that has gone before us. He reminded us of the thousands who have memories of how their lives were changed in this space. (If you want to watch it again, please visit dawsonchurch.org/FaithfulTogether.)

Pastor David's words remind us what this project is really all about. It is not just about improving the design with better egress and ingress, having a larger platform, and upgrading the audio and video. All of those things and much more are important improvements that will take place, but ultimately, what happens in this space is what the project is really about. We are renovating not for our comfort and convenience but for all the life-changing events and moments to come because of what will take place with this project.

In his video, Pastor David read a prayer that was in the bulletin on the day the congregation moved into the brand new Sanctuary on March 18, 1951. These words were spoken by Dr. Edgar Arendall to his congregation almost 74 years ago. Read these words again and let's make them our prayer today:

God make the door of this house we've raised be wide enough to receive all who need human love, fellowship, and the Father's care and narrow enough to shut out envy, pride, and hate. Make its threshold smooth so that it may be no stumbling block to childhood, weakness, or strained feet but rugged and strong enough to turn back the tempter's power. God make the door of this house the Gateway to Thy eternal Kingdom.

WE ARE
RENOVATING NOT
FOR OUR COMFORT
AND CONVENIENCE
BUT FOR ALL THE LIFE-
CHANGING EVENTS AND
MOMENTS TO COME

That is what the project is all about! This building, this Sanctuary, is to be used as a gateway to God's Kingdom! Our prayer is that this Sanctuary will be here for another 74 years so that even more people will come to know Jesus as Lord and grow in relationship with Him. Countless people will come through these doors to enter into new life. They will be baptized or get married in this Sanctuary, dedicate their children, say goodbye to loved ones, be called into full-time service, celebrate KidLife and DNow, and so much more. What could be more exciting for a Christian than to play a part in building God's Kingdom?

On March 16, Commitment Day, let's all be found **Faithful Together** by answering the call given to us and joining those who came before to prepare for those who will come after.



Tom Thompson has been a member of Dawson for more than 30 years. He served on staff as Minister of Stewardship during the campaigns for the Arendall Building and the **Go Love Tell** missions initiative. Tom is currently working closely with the Steering Team in planning and implementing the **Faithful Together** campaign.



2024

AT A GLANCE

DAWSON MINISTRIES & MISSIONS

 **2,158**
Average Worship Attendance

 **171**
New Church Members

 **708**
Average Weekly Bible Study Participants

 **165**
Membership Matters Participants

 **43**
Professions of Faith

 **1,730**
Average Life Group Attendance

 **68**
Baptisms

 **16**
Baptisms in Hispanic Church Plants


 **475**
First Time Guests

 **34**
Family Dedications

 **46**
1st Graders Received Bibles

 **66**
Couples in Together for Life

 **97**
Average AUXANO Attendance

 **39**
Hearts & Hands Buddies
Serving **31** Families



7964

Social Media Followers

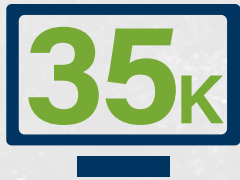
1000+

Handmade Prayer Pockets & Mug Hugs



328

Average Weekly Livestream Views



35k

Online Views



22

GriefShare Attendees

4 New Leaders Trained



7,439

Average Weekly Households

Watching Our TV Ministry



1,233

Preschoolers & Kids at KidLife



415

KidLife Volunteers



115

Hispanic Summer Outreach Attendees



215

Students & Volunteers at Breakaway



325

DNOW Students



130

Hispanic Retreat Attendants



1,211

FRC First Time Visitors



303

Kids at Recreation Summer Camps



108

Ballet Students



9,295

Wednesday Meals Served



986

Facility Work Orders Completed



6213

Resource Space Setups

MUSIC & WORSHIP

 **53**

Orchestra Members Playing
23 Different Instruments

 **30**

New Sanctuary Choir Members

 **143**

Adults & Students on
Chapel Choir Mission Tour

 **3,000**

Candlelight Attendees and
Live Streamed on **1368** Devices

 **69**

Dawsonaires
Including **9** New Members

 **295**

Kids at Summer Music Camp

 **11,544**

DMA Lessons Given to
335 Students

MISSIONS

 **9**

Church Planting Partnerships

 **120**

Coy Backpacks Collected

 **4**

Families Stayed in
the Missionary Houses

 **110**

Team Participants on
11 Mission Projects

 **11**

Countries Represented by ESL Attendees
(China, Guatemala, Mexico, Morocco, Palestine, Russia,
South Korea, Syria, Ukraine, Vietnam & Yemen)

 **322**

Operation Christmas Child Shoeboxes

 **3**

Hispanic Congregations

KIDS CONNECTION



2,300+

Children Served From **650** From Families



38

Foster Families Served



625

Spiritual Support Sessions



108

Active Volunteers



5300+

New & Gently Used Books Given To Children



481

Coats Purchased



400

Packages of School Supplies



427

New Toys Given at Christmas



500

Christmas Stockings



944

Pairs of Athletic Shoes Distributed

THE LEARNING CENTER



116

The Learning Center Students



37

Active TLC Volunteer Instructors



8

GED Graduates from The Learning Center

To view 2024 financial numbers, please visit dawsonimpactreport.com.

FAITHFUL BEGINNINGS

Dawson has had a rich history of faithful people who sought the Lord's will and gave sacrificially to provide for future generations. These inspiring stories tell a little about their faithfulness from the beginning.

On June 3, 1921, a small group of Baptist women met at the home of Mrs. W.C. Sterrett and organized the Baptist Woman's Band of Edgewood. The object of the Band, stated in their constitution, was "to promote the spiritual and social welfare of its members and to foster personal service and missionary spirit." The early Band engaged in many activities and became the model for the WMS groups that followed.

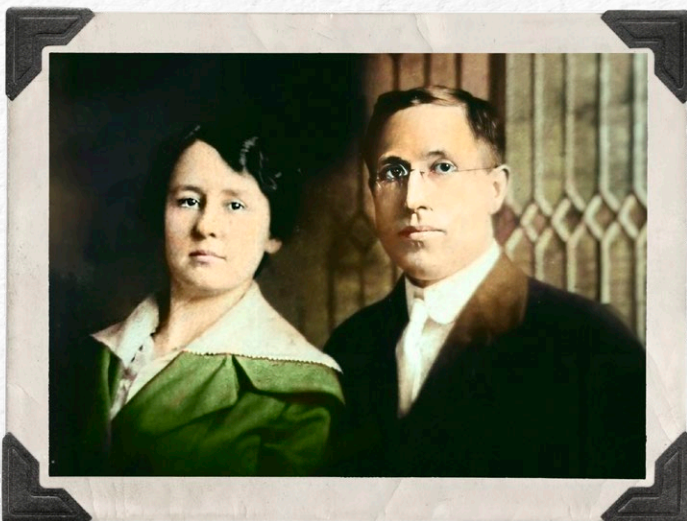
In December 1921, the Baptist Woman's Band elected Mrs. J. T. Callaway as treasurer of their Building Fund. All collections over \$5 a month were to be placed into this fund. These monies would be used towards building the Fieldstone Building, the

first worship and education space for the new church. The Band had continuous meetings from June 3, 1921 until April 1, 1925, when a meeting was held at Mrs. J. A. Coker's house to reorganize themselves as the Woman's Missionary Society (WMS) of the Edgewood Baptist Church.

The group had a will to work, and it was not long before they were well-organized and entered into all phases of mission work. Each of the women made personal sacrifices for her own giving, and so their work grew. Soon after the church had moved into the Fieldstone Building, the group had grown into a full organization providing missionary education through the **Sunbeam**

Band, Girl's Auxiliary (GAs) and Royal Ambassadors (RAs). In 1927 they added the **Young Woman's Auxiliary.**

The women sought to purchase a lot adjoining the church site, so each woman in the Society was to raise \$20 any way she chose. One woman gave the money she received from selling milk, another from the sale of eggs. (That was before there was a law forbidding cows and chickens in Edgewood.) On June 18, 1930, a special church conference was called to ratify the Woman's Missionary Society's purchase of Lot 4 for \$1000. On this lot, a portion of our current Sanctuary building would one day stand.



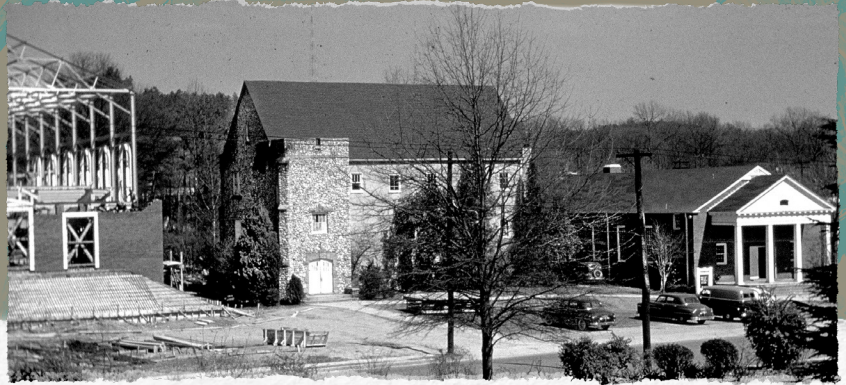
John T. Callaway was a first-year medical student when he met Frances "Fannie" Haggard at a meeting of the Baptist Young People's Union. Their encounter led to friendship, love, and eventually to marriage. The couple built their home in the Edgewood community and thus were numbered among the community's first settlers, with Dr. Callaway becoming an early mayor of the town of Edgewood.

One night the Callaways were attending a prayer service at the Edgewood Community Church, and an offering was taken toward the construction of a manse (a house occupied by a minister of a Presbyterian church.) Dr. Callaway leaned over and whispered to Mrs. Callaway, "I gave \$50 and would have given \$500 if the collection had been for a Baptist Church." Thereupon, Mrs. Callaway got busy trying to find enough Baptists in the vicinity to organize a church.



Lemuel Orah Dawson was a well-educated and respected Baptist leader. He served three terms as president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention, was president of the Southern Baptist Young People's Union for 10 years, and was a trustee of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Howard College. After 32 years as pastor of First Baptist Church Tuscaloosa, he moved to Birmingham in 1924 to teach Bible and church history at Howard College.

Soon Dr. Dawson found that the role of pastor was so ingrained in him that he had no desire to make a complete break from his former calling. One day, his availability was made known to Dr. J.T. Callaway, and shortly thereafter, Dr. Dawson was called as the pastor of the newly formed Edgewood Baptist Church. Dr. Dawson began his pastorate with a great deal of optimism. He often wept in his sermons—so full of God's love and anxious for others to accept His love. He wrote about a wide range of ethical and moral problems in his newsletter, *Now and Then*. Dr. Dawson was a gentle man who held cherished beliefs about the role and destiny of this emerging church, which he often shared in his sermons. "Family life is emphasized in our church," he wrote. "The Lord made the family and the church, the only two organizations he ever made."



The Fieldstone Building, built in 1925, served as Dawson's Sanctuary and educational space until it was torn down in the early 1950s to make room for new buildings. The first services were held on Sunday morning, December 6, 1925. The church's report to the BBA listed the Fieldstone Building with 11 classrooms and an auditorium with a seating capacity of 300. Worshipping in the new building brought modest pride and unbridled joy to its members. They always began their services on Sunday morning by singing the first verse of *Blest Be the Tie That Binds* and ended with the last stanza. "This little ritual meant so much to us," wrote Mrs. A. S. Outland in the historical account *The First Ten Years*. "It seemed to bring us close together."

*It was just ten years ago, it seems but yesterday,
Since a group of loyal women met one day to sing and pray.
It was there we caught the vision that a church was needed here
In dear old Edgewood community that we all hold so dear.
And like the God He always is when we ask for guidance true,
He sent us a leader to show us what to do.
We circled all around the town and landed with a will
And like the little busy bees we swarmed on Coker Hill.
There we gathered all our forces each one carrying his load
And soon a church was built to Him, on our lot on Oxmoor Road.
We are proud of our Church and Sunday School too
Our Young peoples union and W.M.U.
But let us all be mindful to be good Stewards thus
And help to give to others, as the Lord has prospered us.
We should use our many talents for carrying out His Will
And help to take the Gospel to those around us still.
We should use our personality to carry out His Plans,
In fact we should all be faithful Stewards
in this Edgewood Baptist Band.*

by Mrs. A. S. Outland

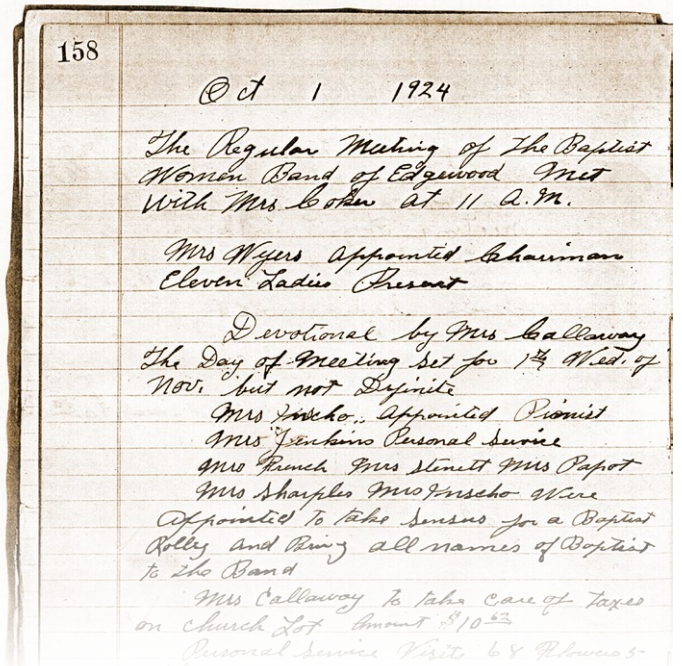


By Shannon Lindsay

THE STORY OF DAWSON IS ABOUT ITS PEOPLE AND WHAT OUR FAITHFUL GOD HAS DONE TO EXPAND HIS KINGDOM THROUGH THEM.

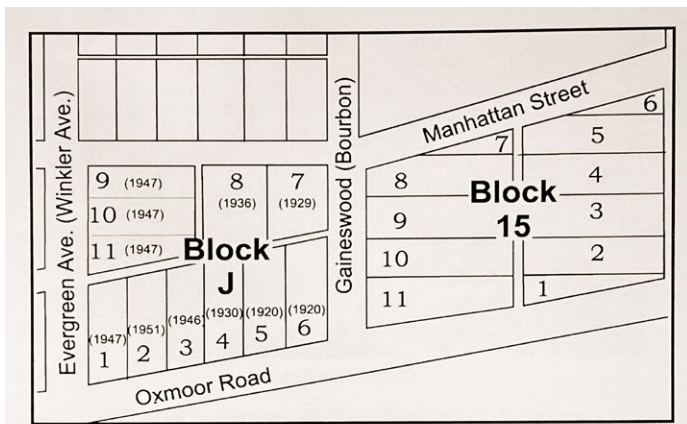
What began as a way to familiarize myself with our history in preparing for a building campaign and a 100-year anniversary celebration quickly became a labor of love, as I dug deeply into the personal lives of our church's namesake and several of our founding members. I wanted to learn as much as I could about Dr. L.O. Dawson. I wanted to know why this small but active group of members at Edgewood Baptist Church felt so strongly about Dr. Dawson that they renamed the church after his passing.

Not only do I have Ray and Doris Atchison to thank for their accounts of Dr. Dawson in their book *Light in the Valley*, but I found many historical documents, newspaper articles, and other bits of information that helped shine a light on who Dr. Dawson was as a person and as a man of God. It was quite evident that in every way possible, the fact that "He Loved Much," was true, just as the plaque in our Sanctuary's Vestibule states. And the impact he had on people still exists today. I received a phone call just a week ago from a man living in Colorado Springs, CO, named Mr. Tolleson. He told me about his parents, who had both been students at Howard University and studied under Dr. Dawson. They must've thought a lot about Dr. Dawson, because they had given Mr. Tolleson the name Dawson when he was born some 84 years ago. Mr. Tolleson was looking for information to share with his eighteen-year-old grandson, also named Dawson. For a pseudo-historian such as myself, I took great pleasure in making a Dawson connection across the country and across the years.

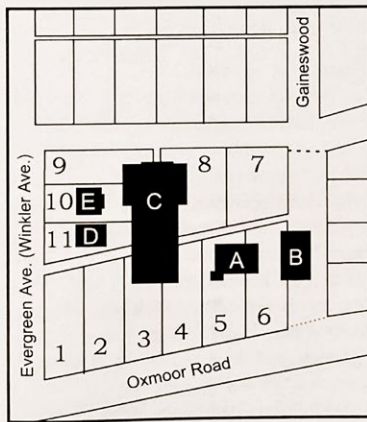


Top photo: Mrs. Callaway (center) at the farewell party for Rev. J. Ivey Edward, Dawson's 3rd pastor, (1947). Above: Minutes from the Baptists Woman's Band.

As I continued my research, I became particularly interested in a lady named Mrs. J.T. (Frances) Callaway, or "Fannie" to her friends. Though I had never heard her name before, I quickly found out that God would use her in a very special way to initiate the beginning of our church.



Lots 7 through 11 of Block 15 were given by Mrs. J. T. Callaway.



The Fieldstone Building (A) was built in 1925 on lots 5 and 6.
 The Chapel Building (B) was placed on part of lot 6 and part of the closed roadway.
 The Main Building (C) was built in 1951.
 The Scout hut (D) and the Duplex (E) stood until the West Wing was added in 1959.
 The Fieldstone Building and Chapel Building were removed to make way for the East Wings.

Frances was married to Dr. John Callaway. They met each other when he was a first-year medical student in Birmingham and Fannie was working at the Jefferson County Courthouse. The couple married and decided to build their home at 102 St. Charles Street, becoming one of few in the neighborhood. Though the Callaways had first met each other at a Baptist Young People's Union meeting, there was not a Baptist church in the area. One night they were attending a prayer service at a nearby church when an offering was taken up for a manse. Dr. Callaway leaned over and told Frances that he would have given more money if it had been for a Baptist Church. That's when Mrs. Callaway set out to find enough Baptists in the area to organize a new church. And organize they did. The Callaways invited five other people to join them, and Edgewood Baptist Church was officially formed in their home on St. Charles Street. Shortly thereafter, the members launched a plan to purchase property nearby and construct a building for the church. With a budget of \$5,500, two lots on Oxmoor Road were purchased.

As the story goes, Edgewood Baptist Church hired its first pastor, Rev. Samuel Heath, who stayed from January through May 1920 before he returned to his home in Equality, AL. Since the recession of 1920 lasted a few years, the Edgewood community did not develop as quickly as hoped. However, the group remained confident of a future for their church,

which was demonstrated by their continued tithing and saving. Within five years, they had paid for the purchased lots and had accumulated \$3,500 in cash.

Mrs. Callaway and her husband, John, were very involved in the community. Dr. Callaway ran Edgewood's first pharmacy, was the town's mayor, and served as a trustee of the church until his passing. He served in many roles of the church and was instrumental in securing Dr. Dawson as pastor. While Mrs. Callaway worked as a realtor, she was also involved in the Baptist Woman's Band, a group that supported missions, and was part of the original nine ladies at the organizational meeting. These early members were very active and became the standard for all WMS/WMU groups that followed. Mrs. Callaway must've been pretty astute financially. In December 1921, the ladies elected her as treasurer of the Building Fund, in which she served for many years.

In December 1925, the Fieldstone Building was constructed and paid for with the money saved from the 1920 group and the money from the Baptist Woman's Band's Building Fund. The church also took out a loan for with a loan of \$11,000 at 7% interest. Even through the Depression of 1929, the church continued to acquire property immediately behind the Fieldstone Building. When the WMS discovered that another lot next to the Fieldstone Building could be purchased for \$1000, they raised the money any way they could, such as selling eggs and milk. (All before an Edgewood law forbidding cows and chickens in town.)

They sponsored teas, cooking schools, and bazaars to help pay off the debt on the building. Throughout the Depression, the deacons would meet to discuss the financial needs. Almost always, they were behind. At one time, when a person was needed to make reports to the committees regularly, Mrs. Callaway offered to keep these records without charge in order to save the church money.



GROUND BREAKING HELD—The Rev. E. C. Arendall, pastor, assists Mrs. T. J. Callaway, a charter member, in breaking ground for the new \$250,000 Dawson Baptist Church. Left to right in the photo are: Mrs. P. M. Carlisle, a charter member; W. C. Sterrett, charter member; Mr. Arendall, Mrs. Callaway and A. L. Dawson, son of the former pastor for whom the church was named.

Dawson Breaks Ground

Dr. Callaway suffered from ill health and died in 1931 at the age of 49. And when Dr. Dawson died in 1938, the Fieldstone Building still had a debt totaling \$1,750. Mrs. Callaway recommended that a fund be created for the purpose of “extinguishing” the debt completely. Mrs. Callaway volunteered to pay \$5 a week until the fund reached \$500. At the church conference that month, it was announced that the fund had been activated and named the J.T. Callaway, J.A. Coker, and L.O. Dawson Fund, a fitting memorial honoring three outstanding charter members.



Though the Callaways had no children of their own, I’m told that Mrs. Callaway loved working in the nursery on Sundays and teaching Sunday School. When we traveled to Dothan, AL last year to interview Mrs. Inice Elise Tarrant for our 100-year documentary, I asked her about Mrs. Callaway. At 95 years old, Inice stated that she remembered her well as a special lady who was soft-spoken and loved our church. She recounted how she vividly remembered Mrs. Callaway working in the nursery on Sundays. Additionally, notes from *Light in the Valley* tell us that she was especially helpful with young couples who were just getting started in marriage. It seems that Mrs. Callaway was very interested in the upcoming generations, and I feel certain that she made a great impact on them.

In May 1939, Lots 7 through 11 of Block 15 were given to the church by Mrs. Callaway. Later that year with the debt on the Fieldstone Building paid off and the church being debt-free, plans were made to build a new auditorium. Mrs. Callaway was appointed to the committee. Because of the war, the original plans were put on hold even though the church was growing every week and was in desperate need of space. When the end of WWII appeared w, a new committee was formed in March 1944, again with Mrs. Callaway serving on the committee. When the time came, she was given the honor of helping the pastor lift the first spade of dirt at the groundbreaking ceremony.

Dawson’s beautiful new Sanctuary was dedicated on March 18, 1951, with Dr. Edgar Arendall at the helm. Mrs. Callaway was so anxious to eliminate the debt on the Sanctuary that



Charter members. Front row, left to right: Mrs. J. T. Callaway, Mrs. James M. Ward, James M. Ward, Hannah Coker, Lewis Dawson Back row: Mrs. T. M. Steen, T. M. Steen, W. C. Sterrett, W. I. Pittman, Mrs. W. I. Pittman

she came to Dr. Arendall one day and said, “Here is my engagement ring. I want it to be sold, and the amount applied to the building fund.” Arendall countered, “You shouldn’t give this ring. Keep it because it is personal.” Mrs. Callaway quickly replied, “But, Pastor, I’m not giving it to you; I’m giving it to the Lord.” Thereupon the chairman of the deacons and the finance chairman took the ring downtown, and sold it for \$2000, a magnificent sum for those years, and applied it to the building fund as she wished.

The more you learn about someone you admire, the more you want to know about them. Mrs. Callaway died in Ringgold, GA, where she had moved during her elderly years to be near family. She died at the age of 91 and was buried next to her husband in Elmwood Cemetery. While I have searched high and low, this is all of the information I have been able to find about her so far—not even her obituary.

Yet, one thing I do know about Mrs. Callaway, or Fannie, as I’m sure she would insist on calling her, is that the faithfulness she displayed over the years has been a personal inspiration to me. In my mind’s eye, I picture this tiny woman with a soft voice, saying that she wanted to “give her all to the Lord,” and I believe she did. I hope her story will continue to inspire future generations to contribute to God’s Kingdom sacrificially like she did, both financially and through the giving of her time and talents all for the glory of God.

On the last page of *Light in the Valley*, Mrs. Callaway is quoted as saying, “A church must move forward. If it becomes static, eventually it will surely die.” Thank you, Fannie, for shining your light brightly for Jesus, and may we seek to do the same.

P.S. I hope you’ll make plans to join me on April 6, 2025, when we celebrate all that God has done through His people at Dawson over the last 100 years.



Shannon Lindsay has served as Dawson’s Communications Director for the past 13 years. Her love of history is only surpassed slightly by her love of sports. In her spare time, she enjoys playing pickleball and spending time with her family. She and her husband, Michael, have one son, Tyler, and an energetic Aussie Doodle named Ginger.

PLEASE JOIN US FOR

Dawson's 100th Anniversary Celebration

Sunday, April 6

SUNDAY MORNING

Worship Services 8:30 a.m., 9:45 a.m., 11:00 a.m.
with Special Message from Dr. Gary Fenton

Former Staff Recognition & Reception
9:45 a.m. in the Social Hall

SUNDAY AFTERNOON

Chapel Choir Reunion – 3:00 p.m.
100 Year Documentary Presentation – 4:00 p.m.
Churchwide Picnic Celebration – 5-7:00 p.m.

Learn more at dawsonchurch.org/100YearCelebration.



Dawson Memorial Baptist Church • 1114 Oxmoor Road • Birmingham, Alabama 35209
Office: (205) 871-7324 • Prayer Line: (205) 795-PRAY • dawsonchurch.org



A Sacred SPACE

By Cyndi Gammill

My family began attending Dawson Memorial Baptist Church when we moved to Birmingham in 1952 when my father was transferred here with his job. I was six years old. The church campus looked very different then. I went to Sunday School in the Fieldstone Building, which was located where the East Wing and Arendall Building is today. My sister, Glenda, went to the nursery in a house where our West Wing is currently located.

The outside of the Sanctuary has not changed much since that time. It is still the same beautiful Georgian brick building with the big white columns. However, the inside has gone through many changes. At that time, there was a back balcony but no side lower or upper transepts. The baptistry also has a different look.

Before the beautiful stained glass window was installed in 2008, there were curtains. Throughout the years, the curtains were changed to different colors depending on the color of the carpet. That baptistry holds a very special place in my heart. Not only were my husband, George, and I baptized there after we made our public professions of faith in Jesus, four generations of our family were also baptized here.

My father, Ralph (Chick) Durham was baptized at the same time I was baptized. He had grown up in a Christian home but had never been baptized. So, he and I "walked the aisle" together, and Dr. Arendall baptized us at the same time. That was a very special time for both me and my dad. Our daughter, Ginny, was also baptized here, as were her children, our grandchildren, Will and Bella Bourland.

The Sanctuary is not only a beautiful place to worship, but it holds so many memories for our family. I think my first memory is marching in as a group for Vacation Bible School. Then there were many choir programs and GA programs as I was growing up.

George and I were married in our Sanctuary in 1969. A few years ago, on our 50th anniversary, we renewed our vows in that exact same spot. We have been blessed to see our children, Greg and Ginny, and our grandchildren participate in the many choir programs and the girls and boys missions programs held in the Sanctuary each year.

Along with the happy times experienced in the Sanctuary that have brought us much joy, there have been times when just being there has helped comfort us. Within its walls, we have had Celebration of Life services for both sets of our parents, and for our precious daughter, Ginny. The presence of God was so evident to us during these times as we were surrounded by His peace and love, as well as the love of our family and friends.

Historically, the word sanctuary has religious roots. Originally from the Latin word *sanctus* or holy, it is a place set apart from the ordinary. Dawson's Sanctuary is that to us and so much more. It has certainly been a place where our family has worshipped and grown closer to God. It has been a place of refuge, comfort, and security for our family for four generations. To us, it has stood as a beacon of hope inviting all who enter to worship the one true Hope. How thankful we are that this beloved, sacred space is where our family of faith gathers together each week as God's beloved people.



Cyndi Gammill and her family have been Dawson members for four generations. She was baptized at Dawson, met her husband George here, and they were married in the Sanctuary 56 years ago. Currently, she sings in the Sanctuary Choir and Dawsonaires and serves at Kids Connection. She has also served with other Dawson ministry teams at the Firehouse Ministries Soup Kitchen for more than 30 years.



Cyndi Gammill models for *Tell* magazine (1958), a national missions magazine for girls.



Ginny Gammill with dad George and Tim Byrd, during a 1989 missions recognition ceremony.



Ralph and Virginia Durham, Cyndi & George Gammill, Charles and Kitty Gammill in 1969.



Cyndi and George Gammill with Dr. Arendall.



Renewing their vows 50 years later.



A BRIEF HISTORY OF DAWSON'S



MUSIC & WORSHIP MINISTRY

By Don Wilson

BUILDING A FOUNDATION

Dawson's Sanctuary, completed and dedicated in early 1951, originally looked much like it does today, though it lacked the transepts and had a much smaller vestibule. In 1954, Lester Barker became Dawson's first full-time music director, marking a pivotal moment as the church transitioned from relying on part-time volunteers to hiring its first full-time music leader. Alongside his wife, Dot, who was the church's first paid organist and children's choir assistant, Barker instituted a strong musical foundation, establishing six choirs for all age groups. It was during this time that the Chapel Choir began, with 59 high school students, traveling to state competitions and meeting weekly. In 1957, they embarked on their first tour to Dothan, AL.

Together, the Barkers built a comprehensive children's choir program that continues to this day. The Barkers' dedication to educating a relatively musically inexperienced congregation transformed the Sanctuary Choir by offering private lessons and training that enabled the members to perform challenging works. Under the leadership of Pastor Edgar Arendall, Barker shaped one of the finest choirs in the region while also solidifying the essential collaboration between the Senior Pastor and Music Minister during worship.

GROWING THE MINISTRY

Following Barker, Marvin Spry built on this strong foundation and elevated the Dawson Sanctuary Choir to new heights within the Southern Baptist Convention. He introduced and enhanced numerous programs, including a new Christmas candlelight service, which continues today as a cherished tradition for church members as well as a gift to the community. A patriotic summer event was soon added, later re-imagined as "Sing Out, America," on the front steps of the Sanctuary. In the late 1960s, the Chapel Choir tour expanded from just a weekend to a full week, reflecting its growth and the significant impact made upon the students. Spry also championed mission outreach, taking the choir beyond the church walls and even touring overseas.

1974-12-8-62

Dawson Names Spry Minister Of Music

Marvin Spry, of the First Baptist Church of Ocala, Fla., has accepted a call to become minister of music at Dawson Memorial Baptist Church. He will assume his duties here on Jan. 2.

Spry, 34, a native of Coolee, N. C., holds BS and MA degrees in music education from Peabody College in Nashville, Tenn.

He came to the First Baptist Church of Ocala eight years ago where he has done an outstanding job in every area of church music, including children, young people and adult choir work. While in Ocala he also organized a unique hand bell choir.

Before coming to Ocala he was minister of music at the First Baptist Church of Clinton, N. C. He also taught high school vocal music in Raleigh, N. C. for a year and served in the U. S. Army for two years.

In Florida he has served on the faculty of the State Youth Music Camp and is an approved worker for the music department of the Florida Baptist Convention.

He participated in a two weeks evangelistic crusade in Jamaica in April, 1960, sponsored by the Southern Baptist Convention Home Mission Board.

Spry is married to the former Colleen Nelson of Kannapolis, N. C. They have three children — Charisse Anne, 9; Marvin Jr., 8, and Clark, 4.


At Dawson Memorial Spry will be in charge of 12 choirs with an enrollment of almost 500.

1st Church - Baptist - Dawson Memorial



MUSIC MINISTER — Marvin Spry.

THE ALABAMA BAPTIST



MR. AND MRS. LESTER BARKER 10/54

Mr. and Mrs. Lester E. Barker will begin Oct. 15 as the new minister of music and organist respectively at Dawson Memorial Baptist Church.

Mr. Barker comes here from Alexander City's First Baptist Church where he is minister of music and his wife is organist.

He is a graduate of Georgetown College, Georgetown, Ky., where he received his BA degree and attended Southern Seminary in Louisville, Ky. He has been minister of music at Cynthiana Baptist Church, Cynthiana, Ky., at Carlisle Avenue Baptist in Louisville, Ky., and at First Baptist Church in Clarksville, Tenn.

Mrs. Barker, a graduate of Carson-Newman College, Jefferson City, Tenn., has attended Peabody Conservatory of Music in Baltimore and has done work toward an MM degree at Peabody College in Nashville.

She taught organ at Gardner-Webb College in Boiling Springs, N. C., and at Austin Peay State College in Clarksville, Tenn.

Otto Wheeley, chairman of the personnel committee at Dawson Church said, "We certainly are fortunate in securing the services of this consecrated couple. The church is looking forward to their coming with us in October and to the further enlargement and expansion of our church's musical program."

The Barkers plan to organize a graded choir program at Dawson which will be under the music department of the church. Plans are made for choirs for each age group of the Sunday School.





When health issues led to Spry's departure after 14 years, Bob Hatfield took the helm, inheriting a music ministry known for its excellence, with more than 800 participants.

A GOLDEN AGE

Hatfield's 36-year tenure emphasized that music in worship served as a "second sermon," complementing the pastor's message. Dr. Hatfield's ministry was marked by godly selflessness and musical excellence, leading a congregation eager to worship God while navigating the ever-evolving landscape of church music. Under his leadership, Dawson's Music Ministry reached truly unprecedented heights. Partnering with longtime pianist and organist Lynda Little and Diane Norton, the Christmas candlelight service, now *Candlelight at Dawson*, was expanded and included more ensembles of the church. The Chapel Choir continued to grow, and traveled internationally every four years. "Sing Out, America," a patriotic event hosted on the front steps of the Sanctuary each July, was loved by the community. Annual choral events became regular occurrences, later accompanied by Dawson's first orchestra.

Hatfield's collaboration with Dawson's church leadership and his hymn selections reflected a deep theological commitment. His personal influence extended well beyond the Sanctuary, taking Dawson's Music Ministry across the globe. In 2008, he led the Sanctuary Choir to a memorable performance at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., where they sang Randall Thompson's *Testament of Freedom*. This milestone inspired further international tours, blending musical excellence with opportunities to share their faith in places such as China, Germany, and Hawaii.

One unforgettable moment occurred during a concert at a German retirement home, where the choir's rendition of *God So Loved the World* moved many listeners to tears. Stories from residents who had lived through dark chapters of history highlighted the healing power of music. Similar experiences in Hawaii revealed a spiritual void, and the choir's music deeply touched congregants who had rarely encountered such expressions of faith.









Sing Out, America!
Sunday, June 27, 7:00 p.m.

A NEW CHAPTER

With the retirement of Dr. Gary Fenton and Bob Hatfield, Dawson entered a new era under the leadership of Dr. David Eldridge and John Woods. This transition marked the beginning of continued growth and evolution for the Sanctuary Choir & Orchestra, as well as other aspects of Dawson's Music & Worship Ministry.

In recent years, worship services have become more unified, reflecting Dawson's commitment to a richly diverse worship experience. This vision is driven by robust congregational singing across a broad range of musical styles and rooted in deep, thoughtful theology. The commitment to "groups leading groups" remains stronger than ever, fostering an environment where every ensemble plays a crucial role in shaping Dawson's worship life while emphasizing the congregation as the church's most important choir.

The Sanctuary Choir & Orchestra continues to play a vibrant role in both corporate worship and through community outreach. On April 10, 2016, in a groundbreaking collaboration with 6th Avenue Baptist Church, they premiered a four-movement work at the historic Lyric Theatre in downtown Birmingham. Building upon this momentum, the Choir & Orchestra later partnered with 10 local churches to debut a seven-movement composition at the Alabama Theatre. In May 2024, the Sanctuary Orchestra presented its first stand-alone concert in the church's history, a milestone that underscores its growing prominence within the worship life of Dawson.

The Chapel Choir remains a cornerstone of Dawson's worship, offering students a dynamic space to develop worship practices that will guide them through life. Their travels have taken them across the country and around the globe, with recent mission tours to Switzerland, Ecuador, and Wales. These tours have evolved to emphasize not only music but also service, with students earning the privilege to perform by first serving the communities they visit. The creation of the Chapel Jazz Band has further energized these mission tours, expanding their reach and impact.

WE REFLECT
ON HOW GOD
USES MUSIC TO
STRENGTHEN
AND BRING US
TOGETHER.

Dawson's commitment to outreach extends beyond traditional settings. In recent years, the Collide Children's Choirs have taken their music to local women's shelters, demonstrating a desire to extend ministry beyond the church's walls and into the community. The Chapel Choir found itself in a similar position during the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving their parking deck rehearsal space to sing in the backyard of an ailing church member who listened from her second-story window. Such moments reflect Dawson's dedication to serving through music wherever there is need.

The Dawsonaires Choir, founded in 1981, has been a keystone ministry of Dawson's Senior Adults. Through these years the choir has ministered in local senior living facilities, churches, VA Centers, traveling throughout the southeast sharing the Gospel and encouraging others.

Another testament to Dawson's musical legacy is the Dawson Music Academy. Founded by Dr. Hatfield, the Academy has grown to welcome over 300 students each week. Under the leadership of Director Kimberly Jones, the Academy recently celebrated its 20th anniversary.

PRESSING ON

As Dawson's Music & Worship Ministry celebrates our church's 100 year anniversary, we reflect on how God has used music to strengthen, challenge, and bind together our congregation over the past century. We commit ourselves to being found faithful as God's people, striving to serve and lead in ways that honor His calling. As we look ahead to the next 100 years, we continue in the firm belief that, in the words of Bob Hatfield, "The song goes on."



Don Wilson Before retiring as a Professor of History at Samford University for 25 years, Don served in the Air Force for 26 years, retiring as a Lt. Colonel. In 2009, he was selected for the Freedom's Foundation Award and is a member of the Alabama Senior Citizens Hall of Fame. He and his wife, Alleen, have been active members at Dawson for more than 60 years. They have three children, five grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren.

Learn about our Chapel Choir Reunion on April 6 at dawsonchurch.org/chapelchoirreunion.

Let's go!

By Kyle Bailey

Participating in a short-term mission project can be a life-changing experience. It is a tremendous gift to leave your comfort zone and see God at work in another context. When we go, our faith is challenged, and we grow in our understanding and dependence upon God. We also encounter a deeper level of Christian community with our fellow teammates and with local believers. God shapes our perspective on the Great Commission and renews our calling to make disciples.

And then it's time to return home. We say our goodbyes to our teammates at the airport and go back to our own familiar surroundings and comforts. All goes back to normal. The memory of God's work in our lives starts to fade as we face the regular rhythm of routine.

Returning home is much like what happened when the children in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* spilled back into the spare room after a lifetime in Narnia. Peter, Susan, Edward, and Lucy had fought battles, gained wisdom, and ruled with grace as kings and queens. Then, without warning, they were suddenly children again. No time had passed in the real world. In their hearts, they knew they were different—it just could not be seen by the others around them.

Those who go on short-term mission trips know this feeling. Though you may not look physically different, your heart is changed, and you have grown significantly in your faith. From many years of leading and facilitating short-term missions, I've come to believe that what we do after a trip may be the most important part of the experience.

When done well, short-term mission projects are catalysts for spiritual growth. After a mission project, or any other spiritual mountaintop, there are a few key practices you can do to guard the work of God in your life.

PRESERVE THE MEMORIES

There is power in keeping a written record of your experience. I always recommend that participants on short-term mission projects journal during their time away. It does not have to be extensive—just notes on key occurrences and answers to prayers. Then, as soon as possible after returning, write down your story. This serves to both preserve the memory of trip and to organize your thoughts in a way that helps you to effectively share your testimony.

I also recommend setting up a shared drive of photos with your teammates. Others' pictures will reflect their unique perspective on the project. Go through the images and choose your favorites to keep in a folder you can quickly access. I would even go as far as to print off these pictures and organize them in an album. This may seem old fashioned, but there is tremendous value in holding a physical memory of your experience.

Pictures and stories can still fall short in truly relaying what you experienced to your family and friends. For this reason, mission teams should get together soon after their project to debrief and share testimonies of God's work. A good idea is to keep in touch with team members as means of staying accountable to commitments to pray and grow.

STAY ENGAGED

A mission trip is an accelerated course in cross-cultural studies. In a short period of time, we learn new words and customs. Our senses are overwhelmed with tastes and smells that seem exotic to our palate. We see the Kingdom of God in action and catch a small glimpse of Heaven—a diverse church from every tribe and tongue worshipping before the Lamb of God.

The beauty of these sensations is that they open a new frontier of global understanding. We've realized now that our cultural experience has been limited. It awakens a desire within us to learn more about the world and God's plan for redeeming His creation.

There are many wonderful resources available to learn more. Over the last 200 years, Christian missiologists have been on the forefront of intercultural research and have produced an ever-deepening library of material. A great way to access this material is through taking a course such as *Perspectives*. There are also tremendous missionary biographies, books by church leaders, Bible studies, and podcasts that can help provide a fuller view of the history and current issues in missions.

There are two online resources that are extremely important for those wanting to learn more about global missions. The Joshua Project (<https://joshuaproject.net>) and Stratus (<https://stratus.earth>) are databases detailing the spiritual needs of every people group and nation in the world. This data informs the mission strategy for both organizations and churches around the world.

The more we learn about missions and the Biblical mandate of the Great Commission, we can become overwhelmed by the immensity of the task. Without divine intervention, we understand that countless souls will spend eternity separated from God. This knowledge should drive us to our knees in prayer.

In addition to the Joshua Project and to Stratus, there are other helpful prayer resources. *Operation World: The Definitive Prayer Guide to Every Nation*, is available in both print and online at <https://operationworld.org>. The IMB has an extensive prayer guide for missions on their website at <https://www.imb.org/pray> and through their app. These resources can help us establish a daily rhythm of praying for the nations.

START WHERE YOU ARE

Living a changed life is a choice we live out day-to-day. The starting point of the Great Commission is loving the neighbor that God placed before us—where we are, right now. Yes, we are called to “go.” All followers of Christ must remain sensitive to the missionary calling to leave behind all that is familiar for the sake of the Gospel. Yet, our primary responsibility is always to make disciples. This calling is not defined by geography. It is not just something we do when we are on a mission project.

In many ways, this is the most difficult lesson to learn from our mission experience. It takes practice and willingness to step out in faith. As you return home, ask God to give you a greater burden for the lost. Pray that He will open your eyes to see the true spiritual condition of those in your sphere of influence. Then, pray for opportunities and the courage and obedience to share the Good News of Jesus as He leads you. And, He will lead you—whether across the street or around the world.



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

DAWSON | 2025 MISSION PROJECTS

EAST AFRICA | EDUCATION SUPPORT PROJECT

Dates: March 7–15
Leader: Liz Cuenin
Type of Ministry: Teaching,
Cross-Cultural Worker Support
Participant Profiles:
Adults, College Students

LAREDO | COLLEGE SPRING BREAK MISSION PROJECT

Dates: March 8–15
Leader: Cole Griffith
Type of Ministry: Service,
Community Outreach, VBS
Participant Profiles: College

SOUTHEAST ASIA | EDUCATION SUPPORT PROJECT

Dates: March 21–28
Leader: Belinda Stroud
Type of Ministry: Teaching,
Cross-Cultural Worker Support
Participant Profiles: Adults

ECUADOR | FAMILY MISSION TRIP

Dates: March 21–28
Leader: Bryan Howard
Type of Ministry: Service,
Community Outreach, VBS
Participant Profiles:
Families, Students

EURASIA MINISTRY SUPPORT TEAM

Dates: March 30–April 4
Leader: Lisa Simpson
Type of Ministry: Children's
Ministry, Worker Support
Participant Profiles: Adults

EURASIA COLLEGE MINISTRY TEAM

Dates: May 12–22
Leader: Avery Flynt
Type of Ministry: Outreach,
Prayer, Evangelism
Participant Profiles: College

COLORADO SPORTS CAMP

Dates: July 5–11
Leader: Andy Cartee
Type of Ministry: Sports Camp,
Community Outreach
Participant Profiles:
Families, Adults, Students

HONDURAS FAMILY MISSION PROJECT

Dates: July 27–August 2
Leader: Reyna Craft
Type of Ministry: Children's
Ministry, Community Outreach
Participant Profiles:
Families, Adults, Students

GUATEMALA | MEDICAL MISSION PROJECT

Dates: August 4–8
Leader: Dr. Randy Stewart
Type of Ministry: Medical
Participant Profiles: Medical
Professionals, Adults, College

UGANDA | MEDICAL MISSION PROJECT

Dates: August 22–Sept. 2
Leader: Debbie Moss
Type of Ministry: Medical,
Refugee Relief
Participant Profiles:
Medical Professionals

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT EACH PROJECT,
PLEASE VISIT DAWSONCHURCH.ORG/SERVE.



A decorative background featuring several large, colorful circles in shades of yellow, blue, purple, and pink. A Polaroid-style photograph is positioned in the upper right, showing two young girls sitting together outdoors in front of a church building with a bell tower. The photo has a white border with the text "ME (LEFT) AT 7 WITH MY SISTER" printed at the bottom. The main title "God's Special Plan For Me" is written in a large, cursive, multi-colored font across the center of the page.

God's Special Plan For Me

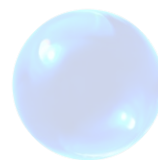
By **Kathleen Bass**

In every season, God is faithful. Over the last several months, these words continue to ring true in my heart and mind. I grew up in Birmingham and have lived here my whole life. From a young age, my parents took me and my two younger siblings to church. Many of my earliest memories are times spent at church with friends and family. I was an energetic child who loved people. I was also a troublemaker who got in trouble both at home and school.

When I was seven, I had a particularly difficult morning at school. My mom was called to come talk to the principal. My seven-year-old life came to a screeching halt. It seems that all the things I had been learning at church my entire life started to click at that exact moment. That afternoon, when I came home from school, was the first time I really felt the weight of my sin. I knew that I had done wrong—by my teacher, my principal, my parents, and God. I remember telling my parents I needed to pray with them right then. I wanted to follow Jesus.

From then on, my life changed. My desires shifted. I wanted to obey God and my parents (although I didn't always do this perfectly!) And I wanted to tell others about what Jesus had done for me. I also wanted to be baptized. I remember sitting down with our children's minister and walking through what it meant to be a Christian and how I could follow Jesus every day. Two years later, I was baptized. My baptism didn't save me, but it was an outward sign that showed my church I was following Jesus.

SPECIAL NEEDS MINISTRY
AT SHADES MOUNTAIN



Growing up, I remember when my family and friends were visiting my grandparents every summer at their lake house in Tennessee, I would plan a VBS for everyone who was there. I learned that I had a passion for teaching kids about Jesus. By the time middle school rolled around, I knew that I wanted to serve the Lord vocationally. That's when I started volunteering with both the children's ministry and the special needs ministry at church. I just loved it.

At the end of middle school and the beginning of high school, I began struggling with unknown health issues and chronic pain. While I couldn't quite understand why God allowed me to encounter these issues at my age, I learned to rely on him more and more in my day-to-day life. At the end of high school, I ultimately decided to go to Samford University so that I could be close to my family due to my health.

The summer after my freshman year at Samford, I spent two months in Melbourne, Australia, interning with the International Mission Board. I worked with a local church and was involved in all different types of ministry—from preschoolers to senior adults. I volunteered in their schools and with their youth groups. I stepped out of my comfort zone—which was working with children in Alabama—to working with people of all ages from all over the world. When I returned to Samford that fall, I was confident in my call to ministry. I knew that God had shaped my life and my story to serve Him and His church.

I immediately switched my major to Christian Ministry and started regularly teaching kids on Sunday mornings.



Disability is a beautiful picture of the brokenness that the world experiences, and the hope we have in Christ.

After four years of college, I thought I was done with school and ready to begin my career. But, I knew that the Lord was guiding me towards further theological education even despite my resistance. And I'm so glad He did.

I started to realize that having a solid theological basis for teaching children about the Bible was vital. Even though I had studied Christian Ministry in college, I could still learn a lot about theology and ministry that would be practical and useful, and I could learn a lot from fellow students in ministry. I began looking for a program where I could specifically study children's ministry and study somewhere other than Birmingham. However, that was not what God had in mind. Beeson Divinity School was where He wanted me to go to seminary.

God used this season in my life in mighty ways. I grew in my knowledge and love of the Lord. I studied Greek and Hebrew. I had the opportunity to study God's Word deeply and to "do life" in community with my classmates. The Lord shaped me during this season and changed my heart. I never imagined that my studies at Beeson Divinity School would lead me to take a mission trip to Asia. I certainly didn't imagine that this mission trip would change the course of my life and ministry. I learned that I not only have a heart for the nations—but also a heart for those with special needs.

In May of 2023, I set off from the Birmingham airport to begin my journey to Taichung, Taiwan. While I was in Taiwan, I spent time with the Hite Family. The Hites' mission focus in Taiwan was to serve college students and families like theirs who were touched by disability. I got to serve in many different areas of ministry while there.



But, my favorite part was getting to "do life" with their family. I was able to see first-hand what life can be like for many special needs families. I came home from that trip wondering if God had shaped my gifts and my story to serve families touched by disability.

At this point, I had reached 10 years of struggling with chronic pain, which had become a manageable, but still difficult, part of my life. I tried to ignore the nudge in my heart about special needs ministry. I told myself that I was not equipped for this kind of ministry. And yet, God equips those He calls. I never imagined that a little over a year later I would be serving at Dawson in this capacity.

A lot of days I feel ill-equipped to serve families touched by disability. However, I know that God has placed me here to serve Him. Disability is a beautiful picture of the brokenness that the world experiences and the hope we have in Christ. How beautiful it is to be a part of a church like Dawson that wants people with special needs to be a part of the church body—God's family of faith. God's Word reveals that every human is made in His image (Genesis 1:26–27) and that we reflect God's character to the world around us (2 Corinthians 3:18). When sin entered the world at the Fall, it caused each of us to experience brokenness in different ways (Genesis 3). Disability draws a unique attention to the brokenness that we all experience.

We see in God's Word how He uses our weaknesses and brokenness to display His power. He also uses these things to accomplish His purpose through us. God promises to heal the world's brokenness and to redeem us from sin through His Son, Jesus. Jesus brings salvation to all people. Those who repent and believe in Jesus Christ will spend eternity with Him.



2024 GRADUATION (HAPPY) DAY



WITH BROTHER (NATE), DAD, MOM AND SISTER (CAROLINE)



SPECIAL NEEDS RESOURCES FAIR
AT BRIARWOOD IN 2024.

God made all people with a purpose—even those with disabilities. In John 9, Jesus heals a man born blind. Before Jesus heals this man, He corrects His disciples' preconceived notions about disability.

Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:3).

God's purpose and sovereignty is displayed even through people touched by disability. Despite our brokenness, God will redeem and restore the world—and He uses His people to accomplish this plan! God made each of us for a special purpose to serve Him.

Ultimately, my vision for our Special Needs Ministry is that families touched by disability would be able to fully belong in the life of our church. We want families to be fully present in worship so that they can grow in the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ. We want to see children and adults with special needs to hear the Gospel in a way that they understand. God created each of us with a special purpose to serve Him and to share the Good News of the Gospel with others.

I never imagined that the Lord would use my own experiences, along with my struggles and gifts, to lead me to Dawson to serve with the Special Needs Ministry. But I see His hand in all of it, gently guiding me down right paths for His name's sake. In every season, God is truly faithful.



Kathleen Bass serves as Dawson's Associate Minister to Special Needs. She grew up in Vestavia and graduated from Samford University. Before coming to Dawson in 2024, she completed her Master of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School. Kathleen is passionate about engaging families touched by disability.

b 2024 / 2025 BETA INTERNS



MASON CAMPBELL
college



LINLEY DARNELL
students



ABBY HORTON
students



CAROLINE MEYERS
women



ELIZABETH PITTS
college



MATT RATTRAY
students



CAROLINE SEELING
kids



MIA TURNER
kids



KATHERINE WILLIAMS
music & worship

BETWEEN THE LINES

By Katherine Williams

When I was called me to vocational music ministry, I remember asking God that if I walked this path, might He lead me to a church that would walk it with me. In my starting weeks of college, I fell in love with Dawson's Music Ministry, and I was blown away by the people within it serving the church as a whole.

At that time, one of my best friends, Hannah Creel, was a current Music & Worship intern, and she slowly convinced me to look at applying to be a Music & Worship BETA Intern. I'm thankful that she pushed me to try something new, because that decision introduced me to the sweetest family of ministry I could have ever asked for.

Thinking back on how my time in BETA began, I can't help but remember my final interview with John Woods. In spring of 2021, there were a lot of BETA applicants, and it was very competitive. I walked in and out of John's office in barely 15 minutes, and I was so sure that I flunked it. I thought it was going well, and then all of a sudden it was just over. I laugh about it now because it shows just how prepared both of us were for that meeting. I called Hannah and told her about the interview, and she giggled while she told me that the short amount of time we spent in the meeting was a sign that I aced it. One of the biggest lessons I have learned through my time working under John is that when you come prepared, you know how to see between the lines.

From my first day in the office to today, it was been evident that John has taught this lesson of being prepared to the entire team. Because of John's heart

I WALKED IN AND OUT OF JOHN'S OFFICE IN BARELY 15 MINUTES, AND I WAS SO SURE THAT I FLUNKED IT.

behind his leadership, I know that every one of the opportunities that he has given me in this internship has been filled with the entire team's support. The Music & Worship team has become like family to me. Melissa Bonds, Brent Reeves, Kim Settle, Shannon Mooney, and Kim Vanderver have all taken intentional time to sit down with me and teach me about what they do for our church and how they strive to lead others with love.

Each semester, I worked with our Collide Choirs, where Hailey Pepper mentored me in how to intentionally connect with the sweet kids on Wednesday nights, not just how to make good music. When I taught our Chapel Choir an anthem for Candlelight in the fall of 2022, Angela Roberts was cheering me on during each rehearsal, knowing all along how nervous I really was. In spring of 2024, when I conducted our Sanctuary Orchestra, Dan Mullis encouraged me every week while I was making the switch from conducting voices to conducting instruments for the first time. When I've been privileged to lead our Staff Worship services, I always see Tina Lindsey singing with the biggest smile, her face clearing showing the pure joy she has while worshipping with her friends.

Last summer when I co-led the music rotation for KidLife, Kimberly Jones came into multiple sessions to support the ministry of leading the kids to sing songs of faith. This past fall when I led our Sanctuary Choir, Brent Coleman offered me so much meaningful feedback on how to lead our choir in worship, not just in singing. And finally, when he learned about the desire I have to help songwriting grow in the church, John Woods paved the way for me to be able to lead our church's inaugural songwriting intensive that birthed eight original songs of faith.

In every single opportunity I've listed, each member of the Music & Worship team has supported me every step of the way. My internship has been filled with wonderful opportunities, but the greatest gift of all has been seeing between the lines. Because of this lesson, I've learned how to grow relationships deeply and to love people as much as they have loved me. I am so grateful to have served as an intern for this church. The family that is Dawson's Music & Worship team has left a lasting impression on me, and it's the mark of a special place that holds special people.



Katherine Williams has interned with our Music & Worship Team since the Fall of 2021. She was born in Birmingham and was dedicated at Dawson. She enjoys trying new instruments, teaching others, and learning new things as much as possible.

LINDA HILLYER

40

YEARS and counting...

By Christi Cowan

There are a few things that might surprise you about Linda Hillyer. What will not surprise you, however, is that Linda keeps meticulous records. After all, as Dawson's Administrator of Membership & Records, Linda has managed Dawson's membership database for the last 40 years.

When Linda first started working at Dawson in 1977, she worked with the Singles Director before taking on the membership duties. Nearly six years into that role, she left to work with her husband, Billy, who was the principal at a local Christian school. They nearly moved to Florida for a job offer but decided to stay in Birmingham since they were nearing the end of an adoption process. Three days after they declined that job offer, they found out that they were about to become parents to a baby girl.



1988

Support Staff

Pat Jones, Receptionist Pat Bloom, Copy Services
Kelley Akers, Financial Linda Hillyer, Data Processing Bea Williamson,
Not Pictured: Nancy Kimbrough, Financial



2024

Linda stayed home with their daughter, Meredith, for several years and then later decided that she would like to go back to work. Just a few minutes after mentioning this to her mother, the phone rang, and Linda was offered her old job back at Dawson. "Gene Turner called me and said 'Your old job is open. Do you want it back?' And I said, 'Yes I do.' And so here I am, 40 years later, still here."

Linda says that one of the best parts of working at Dawson is the environment and the coworkers around her. "For 40 years I have been surrounded by dedicated, Christian men and women who love God and who provide a wonderful work environment. Every day we come together, caring for one another, to do the work of the church."

Linda expressed how much she appreciates the people who make Dawson their family of faith and the fact that so many of Dawson's members are mission-minded. She has also seen the many ways that God has worked in the life of our church. "Your faith gets stronger because you see how God works things out. He may not work them out the way you want Him to, but He works them out."

Linda has seen many things come and go over the last 40 years at Dawson, but the basic bonds of friendship have remained. Linda and Billy are part of the Lenora Pate and Judy Mason Life Group, where they have wonderful friends who always offer encouragement and support.

When it comes to the work week, some of the newer advances have been very welcomed. "When I first came, we didn't have computers," she said. "We used typewriters." Things are easier now, Linda says, since finding and updating membership records requires only a few clicks in Planning Center.

Linda's coworkers are quick to point out that she is a very caring and giving person, who is also very dedicated to her job. Finance Director Marilyn Lloyd has worked with Linda for over 22 years. "She's one of the most giving people I've ever known. If you're in need, she's going to be there to help you. She's just that kindhearted. She's also on top of things. She's a very quick worker. If you need something done, she'll make sure she gets it done for you."

"There's a lot I could say about Linda," says Laine Stidham, Discipleship Ministry Assistant,

but if I had to pick one thing, it would be how much joy she brings. Rarely does a week go by when we don't find ourselves smiling, or often laughing, when we have to investigate something for a new project or seek solutions to a problem. Linda loves the challenge, and we've had some really hilarious times together when doing our best detective work. I'm thankful to work with her!"

Business Administrator Randy Poe shared, "It's so rare, for the world we live in, to have an employee for 40 years. Linda's knowledge and experience are invaluable, and we are so blessed to have her as a staff member."

As for hobbies, Linda has a green thumb and enjoys her garden. It's not uncommon for her to bring flowers, plant clippings, or vegetables to share with Dawson staff members. She also loves animals and has a dog and two cats. She enjoys painting, watching medical dramas, and might be a little bit of a daredevil. On her 65th birthday, Linda celebrated by riding all the roller coasters at Six Flags Over Georgia. She wanted to do something even more thrilling for her 70th, so without hesitation, she decided to go skydiving! "I was a little nervous at first," she said, "but I wasn't scared."

Linda and Billy are both appreciative for the life they have together and how Dawson has played such an integral role. "We have achieved an uncomplicated lifestyle that is gratifying to both of us," she said. "Together we have learned to appreciate the small and satisfying pleasures that life offers. Learning how to trust God in all things and how He is with us always—through the difficult times as well as the happy ones. Our love for the Lord has brought us a deep sense of love and gratitude for one another, our family, and our church family."

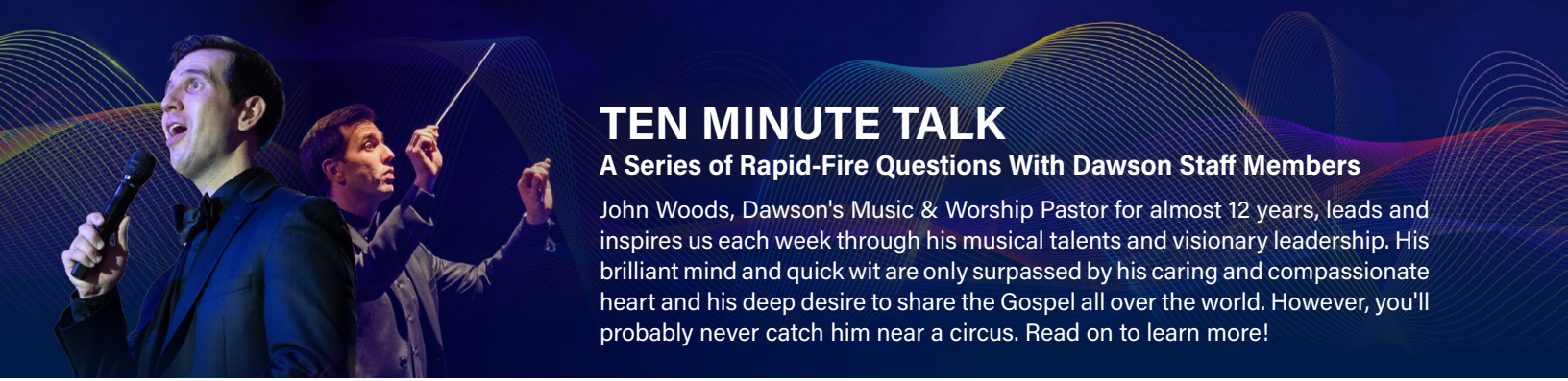
Linda and Billy live in Homewood, and they have one daughter, one granddaughter, and one great grandson.

When asked about her accomplishments and what gives her joy, Linda beams when sharing that her marriage and family are an accomplishment, and that she has much gratitude for her job here at Dawson. "And," she adds, "I jumped out of an airplane, so I'm pretty proud of that!"

Thank you, Linda, for 40 years of service and dedication to Dawson. Your Dawson family is so grateful for you!



Christi Cowan serves as one of Dawson's graphic designers and also manages the website. She has a background in journalism and print media. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, scrapbooking, and playing with her cats. She loves all things Disney and will probably beat you at Disney trivia.



TEN MINUTE TALK

A Series of Rapid-Fire Questions With Dawson Staff Members

John Woods, Dawson's Music & Worship Pastor for almost 12 years, leads and inspires us each week through his musical talents and visionary leadership. His brilliant mind and quick wit are only surpassed by his caring and compassionate heart and his deep desire to share the Gospel all over the world. However, you'll probably never catch him near a circus. Read on to learn more!

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Round Rock, a little suburb of Austin, Texas. I went to school and church downtown at Hyde Park Baptist, so I spent a lot of time on the highway. Austin was much smaller and much weirder back then.

What instruments do you play?

I can play the guitar, piano, mandolin, ukulele, organ, and kazoo.

Do you have a nickname? No.

Favorite Birmingham restaurant?

For date night, Lindsay and I really enjoy Soho Standard.

What do you like to do on Saturdays?

My grandfather and father both did woodworking, so I enjoy it as a hobby. I have a shop in the garage.

What was your first car?

A white Mitsubishi Galant.

What was your first job?

I worked the register at "Earful of Books," an audio bookstore in Austin.

What career would you have if you weren't in ministry?

Likely an attorney.

You went to school at Baylor. What's the best thing about Waco?

Brisket! There was a little hole-in-the-wall next to Baylor called Vitek's that sold something called a gut pack: brisket, cheese, onions, beans, Fritos—basically, a heart attack in a bowl.

What's on your perfect sandwich?

I love a good BLT. Add some avocado, and I'm sold.

What's a favorite Bible verse?

Zephaniah 3:17 is a favorite. It's a reminder that we worship a singing God, and every beautiful melody we make is in harmony with the Creator of beauty.

Favorite band or performer?

I'm a big James Taylor fan. My dad raised me on folk music.

What's a good childhood memory?

I remember going with my dad into interior Mexico, to Bustamante, and spending 17 hours inside a cave with all the repelling gear and other accoutrement. My dad is an adventurer, and that's a memory I'll never forget.

How did you meet your wife?

Lindsay and I met at the student union building at Baylor. I made a sarcastic comment, and she fired one back. In that moment, I knew she was for me.

What outdoor activity do you like?

I enjoy hiking and camping. I have a little group I hike with periodically throughout the year.

Did you play any sports growing up?

This question is unfair because you already know the answer. Go sports!

Cats or dogs?

Dogs.

How do you take your coffee?

Too much creamer.

Cups a day?

Four.

Favorite season?

Spring, when hiking is better.

What holiday tradition does your family have?

On Christmas Eve, we always have a meal of appetizers after the service. It's something I look forward to every year.

Favorite candy?

Nerds clusters.

What made you interested in music?

My father is musical, and my grandmother used to play the Hammond organ by ear. Every time we went to her house, she and her sister would put on concerts. I guess I got hooked.

What famous person would you like to invite to dinner?

Jim Carrey. I'm fascinated by his spiritual journey and his thoughts about the elusiveness of meaning.

Would you rather be able to fly or breathe underwater?

Fly—zero commute time!

Dream travel destination?

I'd love to take a four-week hike in the Swiss Alps. Ideally, someone else would be carrying my bag.

What's something would you like to learn how to do?

Speak Spanish fluently.

Does pineapple belong on pizza?

I wouldn't order it, but if you handed me a free slice, I wouldn't turn it away.

What makes you laugh?

People doing impressions.

Who do you look up to?

I owe a lot to my predecessor, Bob Hatfield. He was a mentor and friend, and there are many times each month I think about having lunch with him and him taking out his little pocket notebook of questions to discuss.

Early bird or night owl? Early bird.

What time to you typically go to bed?

9:30 p.m.

What's something most people don't know about you?

I hate clowns. All clowns.

Best snack to have during a movie?

Popcorn with too much butter.

Who would play you in a movie?

David Schwimmer

How would your kids describe you?

Funny and weird. Joke's on them because they are, too.

What's something you're proud of?

Being married to my wife, Lindsay.

Who was the last person you called?

Brad Gowing. We have a hike to plan.

What animal would you choose as your sidekick?

This is a weird question, but the Limu Emu is pretty funny.

SONG | PRAYER | WORD

*HE MUST
INCREASE*

auxano

*I MUST
DECREASE*

TUESDAYS | 7:00 P.M.

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Q
A

Questions That Every Christian Should Ask

(And Answer)

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