

FEBRUARY 2020

Together

AT DAWSON

35

&

COUNTING

One Staffer's Story

2019
YEAR IN
REVIEW

Snapshots From
DNOW / 2020

LOOKING
AHEAD

GO
Love
Tell

CELEBRATING
HOPE THROUGH
CELEBRATE RECOVERY

AUXANO

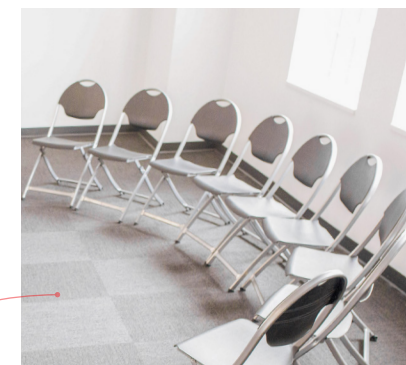
COLLEGE + YOUNG ADULT SERVICE

TUESDAYS | 7:00 P.M.
CHAPEL @ DAWSON

DAWSONCHURCH.ORG/AUXANO

Together

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ON THE COVER

Megan Harris and Aniyah McCastlin, 8th graders at Homewood Middle School and Oak Mountain Middle School, participate in DNOW 2020.

JOIN US

Sunday Morning Life Groups: 8:25 a.m. & 9:40 a.m.
Sunday Morning Worship: 8:25 a.m., 9:40 a.m. & 11:00 a.m.
Hispanic Worship: 11:00 a.m., Chapel

WATCH LIVE

dawsonchurch.org/live



dawsonchurch.org/AfterTheSermon

From



Dr. David Eldridge
Senior Pastor

Pastor David

The start of a new year and a new decade can produce a wide range of emotions. For some, the turning of the calendar page represents a fresh start and the excitement of unforeseen roads to travel in the year to come. For others, it represents another reminder of how fast life is passing by with no hopes of slowing it down. For the Christian, the start of a new year and a new decade offers the opportunity to consider where we are in the journey that God has called us to. In this journey, it is helpful to look back and see where we have traveled and to look ahead to the road before us.

If this is true in our own spiritual journey, it is also true in our life as a faith family. In this 2019 Year In Review, we will take a look back in celebration of God's work at Dawson over the past year, while also looking ahead to where He is leading us. As we look back, you will see that there is much to celebrate. While we thank God for His work in our midst and the tangible results that we can measure, we also admit that the work of the Spirit can never be captured by numbers alone. Numbers tell a story, but not the entire story. In these pages, we want to tell you more stories of the people in our family of faith.

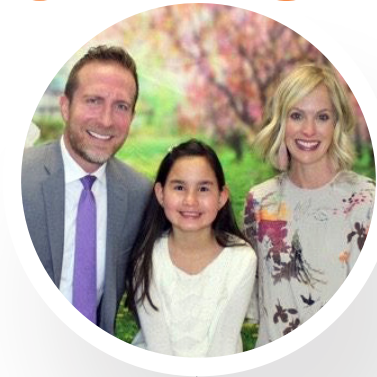
While we look back with gratitude, we also look ahead with great expectancy to what God has in store for the next chapter of the story He desires to write in our church. Our God is not just a God of the past. He's a God of the present and of the future. As we look ahead, let's pray and work toward His will for our lives and for our church.

We move ahead, with the great confidence in the "God who works in us, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

Pastor David

Life Groupstories

By **Holly Kennedy**



Brad, Holly, and Coco Kennedy moved to Homewood in November of 2018. Brad works for Encompass Health, and Holly is a stay-at-home mom. Coco is in the 5th grade and attends Spring Valley School. They enjoy traveling, trying out new restaurants, and spending time with family & friends.

When we moved to the Birmingham area from Cincinnati, a primary goal was to find a church home. We visited a Dawson service one time, and we knew it was where we belonged. Because we have encouraged our daughter to participate in a Children's Ministry, we knew that we needed to set the example. Therefore, our next goal was to find a Christ-centered small group. Several Dawson members encouraged us to visit different Life Groups in order to connect with others who desire to grow in their faith.


Members of Life Groups pray for each other. In our group, we have the opportunity to exchange prayer requests and praise reports. Whether it's a time of great challenges or a time of great triumphs, our Life Group serves as a support system so that no one feels alone in their specific situation.

Finding our Life Group has given us the opportunity to connect with fellow believers. In Romans, Paul taught us that we can strengthen each other's faith. We can use our gifts and talents to encourage and challenge each other to grow as Christians.

Ultimately, our Life Group makes us better servants and disciples. Each Sunday, our fellow group members share ways to get involved in church activities and discipleship opportunities. The teachers and fellow members provide testimonies and insights that challenge us to become closer to God. Hebrews 10:24 tells us to "consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." Our Life Group provides the support we need to mature as believers and to live out our faith. †


A LOOK BACK AT 2019

 **87**
Baptisms

205 
New Church Members

 **2,158**
Weekly Average
Worship Attendance

 **250**
Kids Heard The Gospel
at Day Camp

1,841 
Weekly Average Life
Group Attendance

 **190**
1st Time Guests


15,000
Average Weekly
TV Viewers

 **1,641**
Social
Media Posts

217
Average Weekly
Live Stream Viewers

1,212
 Health
Program
Attendees

 **120**
Gospel Conversations/
Men's Basketball League

79 
Kids Enrolled in
"Gospel Class" &
"I'm a Christian Now"

 **42**
KidLife Gospel
Conversations

 **52**
Births/
Adoptions

400 
KidLife Volunteers

 **1,300**
Preschoolers
& Kids at KidLife

 **106**
Couples
Registered | Together
For Life

400 
DNow Students & Volunteers

250
 Homebound
Ministry Visits

18 
Stephen
Ministers

126 
Dawson Day School Students

BY THE NUMBERS




 **1,276,100**
Miles Traveled on Mission Trips


 **222**
International Mission Trip Participants


 **36**
Students in English Classes in Southeast Asia


 **7**
International Career missionaries


 **22**
Volunteers Held VBS in Poland

 **26**
GED Sections Passed at The Learning Center

 **67**
ESL Students

 **255**
Backpacks Given in Fultondale & Coy, AL

 **2,200**
Hours Volunteered At The Learning Center

 **95**
Foster Children Given Christmas Gifts

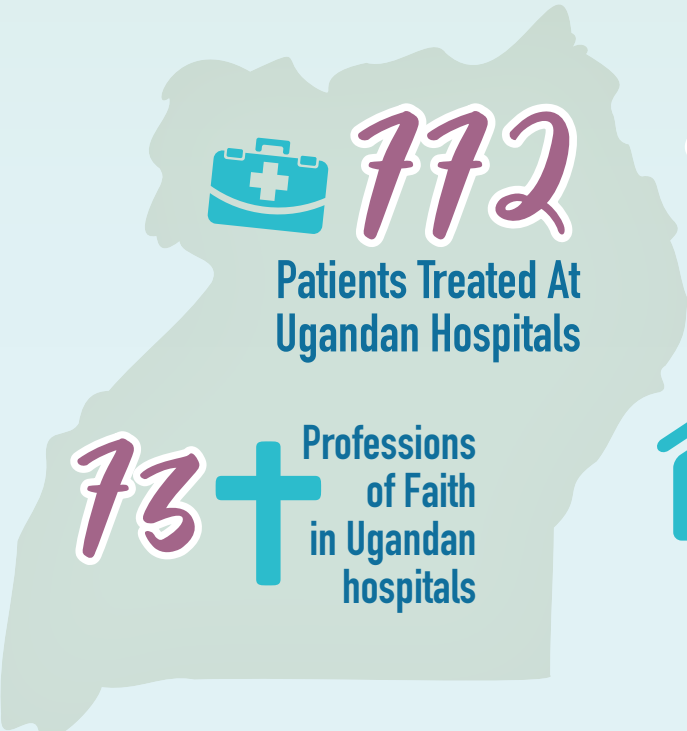
 **538**
Shoeboxes For Kids


HISPANIC CONGREGATIONS


 **17**
Baptisms


 **100**
Children Attended VBS


 **15**
Nations Represented



 **772**
Patients Treated At Ugandan Hospitals

 **73**
Professions of Faith in Ugandan hospitals

 **240**
Hours Training Pastors In Northeast Africa

 **8**
Church Plants Supported



 **450**
Foster Children Served

 **1,900**
Children Served

 **262**
New Coats

 **10,000+**
Volunteer Hours

 **1565**
New Pairs of Shoes

 **9,917**
Private Music Lessons

 **288**
Sanctuary Choir & Orchestra Members

 **5884**
Candles Raised at Candlelight

 **137**
Chapel Choir Mission Tour Participants

 **208**
Collide Choir Singers

FINANCIAL INFORMATION



TITHES & OFFERINGS

\$9,725,290



EXPENSES

\$9,703,419



TO DATE RESERVES

\$679,257

24%

MISSIONS, MINISTRY
& MUSIC

16%

OPERATIONS

17%

FACILITIES
SUPPORT

43%

PERSONNEL



2015-2019

CONTRIBUTIONS

CUMULATIVE TO DATE
THROUGH DECEMBER 31, 2019

\$5,662,111

ACTUAL 5-YEAR PLEDGE GOAL

\$5,603,626

2019 CONTRIBUTIONS

\$720,324

GENERAL ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES

\$ 352,931

BIRMINGHAM EXPENSES

\$ 738,104

MAINE EXPENSES

\$1,034,496

NORTHEAST AFRICA EXPENSES

\$ 642,589

TANZANIA EXPENSES

\$ 436,391

SOUTHEAST ASIA EXPENSES

\$ 384,163

FUTURE PROJECTS

\$ 34,520

TOTAL EXPENSES TO DATE

\$3,623,194

A PEACE & PURPOSE

By **Chris White** | Minister to Students



I DISCOVERED
A NEWFOUND
PEACE AND
PURPOSE
I HAD BEEN
LONGING
FOR.

Growing up, life was simple. I was raised in a tiny, East Texas community called Nogalus Prairie. Nogalus (no-gal-us) is located 30 minutes from Lufkin, Texas, and also the nearest Walmart! For the majority of my childhood, our family attended a small, independent Baptist church in the community. We lived on the same 18-acre lot as my paternal grandparents, and my maternal grandparents lived two miles away, a short 5-minute drive down a dirt road. Our entire lives revolved around family and community in Nogalus.

When I was 9 years-old, my grandfather passed away. Though I recognized the gravity of his passing, I had no clue how his death would profoundly impact the rest of my life. Soon after my grandfather's death, my family was invited to attend a church called Southside Baptist Church, in Lufkin, Texas (a 30-minute drive from our home). We began attending Southside regularly and quickly found it to be a refuge for our family. During a season of life that brought many changes, Southside provided community for our family as we searched for a new normal. A year after our first visit at Southside, we moved to Lufkin to avoid driving 30 minutes one way every time we attended church.

I thank God for Southside Baptist Church, for her people and influence in my life. I'm also thankful for our family's move to Lufkin. The move proved to be monumental for the future direction of my life, as it provided a community and discipleship that my family never experienced before. Though I knew God was real, I allowed death and divorce to harden my heart towards God's grace. It wasn't until the summer after my senior year of high school that the Lord would reveal to me the sin and bitterness in my life. He used the combination of a student camp in New Orleans and intentional discipleship from my student pastor to highlight my need for Him. The Wednesday night of camp, I surrendered my life to God, recognizing that I needed God's peace and forgiveness.

God radically changed my life that week in New Orleans. I discovered a newfound peace and purpose I had been longing for. A call from God to ministry would follow soon after my salvation. Though I continued with my plans to attend Texas A&M, I soon began to feel a nudge in a different direction. After attending A&M for one semester, I moved back to Lufkin to attend a nearby community college and help with Southside's student ministry. Over the course of that semester, I became increasingly involved in the student ministry and developed a love for serving the church community. God would use my involvement with Southside's student ministry to call me into full-time ministry.

CONTINUED



The move back home also allowed me to meet my wife, Kayla. Kayla also served Southside's student ministry in the summer of 2012. Shortly thereafter, I moved to Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, in Spring 2013. Kayla and I became engaged (Spring 2014), we graduated from Liberty (Fall 2014), and moved to First Baptist Church in Cleveland, Mississippi, to serve as their Minister to Students (Spring 2015).

Since then, I have been blessed to finish my Master of Divinity from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and begin a PhD at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. In addition, Kayla and I have been blessed with our son, Grayson

(2), and Madilyn Kaye, due at the end of January 2020! It is also by God's grace that in September 2019, He led us to Dawson to serve as Minister to Students.

"let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

From my salvation in 2011 and call to ministry in 2012, 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 has been a linchpin in my life: For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so

that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

I am amazed when I look back at my life. This is not the path I would have chosen for myself—I would have definitely chosen a simpler course. However, I am thankful for 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 and the encouragement it gives and reminds me that God often uses the most unlikely of people. I am thankful that God's plans are often much different than our own. If my life had played out the way I planned, I would have missed so many of the joys I've experienced since my salvation, one of those being the joy of serving Dawson as Minister to Students. Throughout the course of my life, God has continued to pour His faithfulness over

my family and gracefully lead us into each season. I am grateful for my call to ministry, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to serve alongside our family of faith here at Dawson! †



Chris White is married to Kayla. They have one son, Grayson who is two years-old, and a new daughter, Madilyn Kaye, who was born on January 30, 2020.



WHAT'S
NEXT FOR
GO LOVE TELL?
IT'S NOT OVER...

In May of 2015, our Family of Faith voted to give \$5.6 million above their regular tithes and offerings to attempt **Go Love Tell** mission projects in Tanzania, Northeast Africa, Southeast Asia, Maine, and Birmingham. As the Missions Pastor, I have to admit, I was a little nervous. Due to the cost, size, and scope of the projects, it was clear to me that if God did not move to accomplish these projects through us, there were a lot of things that may not go well. As our church enters into the final months of the first five years of Go Love Tell, those nervous feelings are long gone. We can now look back and confidently say that God, in fact, did move. Evidence of this can be seen in several areas. One was with our missionary partners. They were well-prepared beginning to end, and we were able to help them accomplish their strategic goals at a time when most of them had no funds to do ministry. Another area was in the financial response from our church members. Our members were generous by pledging and giving more than our original estimated Go Love Tell budget. This generous giving not only allowed us to quickly begin all five major projects, but it also has laid the foundation for the continuation of Go Love Tell in years to come without the need for another financial campaign.

Is **Go Love Tell** coming to a close in May of 2020? Absolutely not! On two Sundays, April 19 and 26, our congregation will celebrate God's faithfulness in all of our worship services. Following those celebration Sundays, we will launch the next phase of Go Love Tell. On Sunday, May 3, our missions focus for the next five years (2021 through 2025) will be presented to the church in a called business session. Details are still being worked out, but we do know that we will be intentionally focused on three areas of ministry. These will include developing church revitalization partners in Birmingham, partnering with second generation church plants in the United States, and sending our members to specific unreached people groups. We have a great deal to celebrate in our recent past and a great deal to look forward to in the future.

Thank you for your tremendous faithfulness in praying, giving, and serving as a part of **Go Love Tell!** †

Ben Hale



Ben Hale serves as Dawson's Evangelism and Missions Pastor. He has led all of Dawson's local, national, and international missions efforts since 2000.

How "Celebrate Recovery" Restores Hope

By Mary Jones

At some point in our lives we will all need some kind of healing. Whether because of an illness, a broken relationship, financial instability, or emotional distress, there will be times when we look for answers and ask God for healing. But what about healing from addiction? For many of us who have never faced a personal kind of addiction such as drugs, alcohol, or pornography, we tend to measure those types of struggles with a different kind of ruler. It's easy to have empathy for illnesses, broken hearts, financial concerns, and emotional struggles, yet why do we practice a different kind of judgment towards those with addiction?

The book of Proverbs is loaded with admonitions or warnings about life. It only takes the influence of one "friend" to guide you into things you really have no desire to do. Addictions are frequently started because of adverse circumstances in our lives. Perhaps one thinks that drugs or alcohol will make the hurt go away, but as many know, it only causes things to worsen.

John Baker, a man addicted to alcohol, knew all too well the need for empathy, guidance, shelter, and love for those suffering with addiction, so he began the ministry that we call Celebrate Recovery. Celebrate Recovery was started in 1991 at Saddleback Church in California. Dr. Rick Warren, Senior Pastor at Saddleback Church, once said,

"You may think recovery is only for drug addicts and alcoholics, people whose lives seem out of control. But that's just not true. The Bible teaches that all of us have addictions in our lives. Sin is addicting, and the Bible says that all have sinned. Not one of us is perfect. We've all blown it, we've all made mistakes. We've hurt ourselves, we've hurt other people, and others have hurt us. Because of sin, each of us needs repentance and recovery in order to live the way God intended."

In September of 2018, Dawson launched a new Celebrate Recovery Ministry under the leadership of Kristen Torres, Dawson's Minister of Spiritual Development. This ministry offers a place where people can have hope and see that they do have a future. To "celebrate" is to mark off an occasion or event, especially a joyous one. "Recovery" means rescue, a regaining of something lost. Haven't we all felt loss in one way or another?

On Tuesday nights, I serve alongside a group of volunteers as part of Dawson's Celebrate Recovery ministry. We come every week because we want to pour love into men and women who are suffering with addictions. Every volunteer involved has a heart for service, but for many of us, there is an even deeper meaning behind our commitment. We are there because we, too, are healing from heartaches caused by the addictions of our own family members.

Volunteers with Celebrate Recovery are committed to letting the participants know that God cares about their future. We look forward to seeing every attendee on Tuesday nights, as we greet them with open hearts, open arms, and big smiles on our faces. Giving our time, energy, and attention to the people that participate in this celebration is easy, not just because we want to show God's love to them, but also because God shows us every week how His love is poured right back into us through each of these men and women. We have become a family—a family I am proud to be a part of.

Celebrate Recovery begins with a meal. Serving this meal always makes me think about how Jesus served His people when He walked on this earth. Next, we have music—we have a fantastic live band every week. Some of the band members are actually from Brother Bryan Mission. We all enjoy making a joyful noise praising the Lord. After the music, we have a speaker; different people share messages of hope, perseverance, and steps to recovery, along with personal testimonies of overcoming addiction through Christ-centered recovery. After the program, we give out awards celebrating individual milestones toward recovery. That always makes me cry. I know how hard it is for these men and women to overcome addiction. Every day is a challenge. After the program, they break into small groups where they share and pray about challenges they are facing that week. All of these conversations are completely confidential. After the small groups meet, everyone enjoys dessert and leaves happy and full, both physically and spiritually.

I can't begin to tell you how much this program has meant to me. It has helped me get through my son's death. My son, David, was an alcoholic. He once told me he took his first drink at age 14 while attending a wedding reception. That one drink led to a lifetime of heartache and struggle. Upon completion of X-ray Technology school, where he was voted

"Most Outstanding Student" by his professors, he began a wonderful career working closely with doctors and surgeons in different hospitals here in Birmingham, AL. He was recognized for his skills and outstanding patient care, so eventually was promoted to work side-by-side with top cardiologists, performing heart catheterizations. He had a loving wife and an adoring daughter. David eventually landed his dream job with a medical company. From the outside, it looked like he had it all.

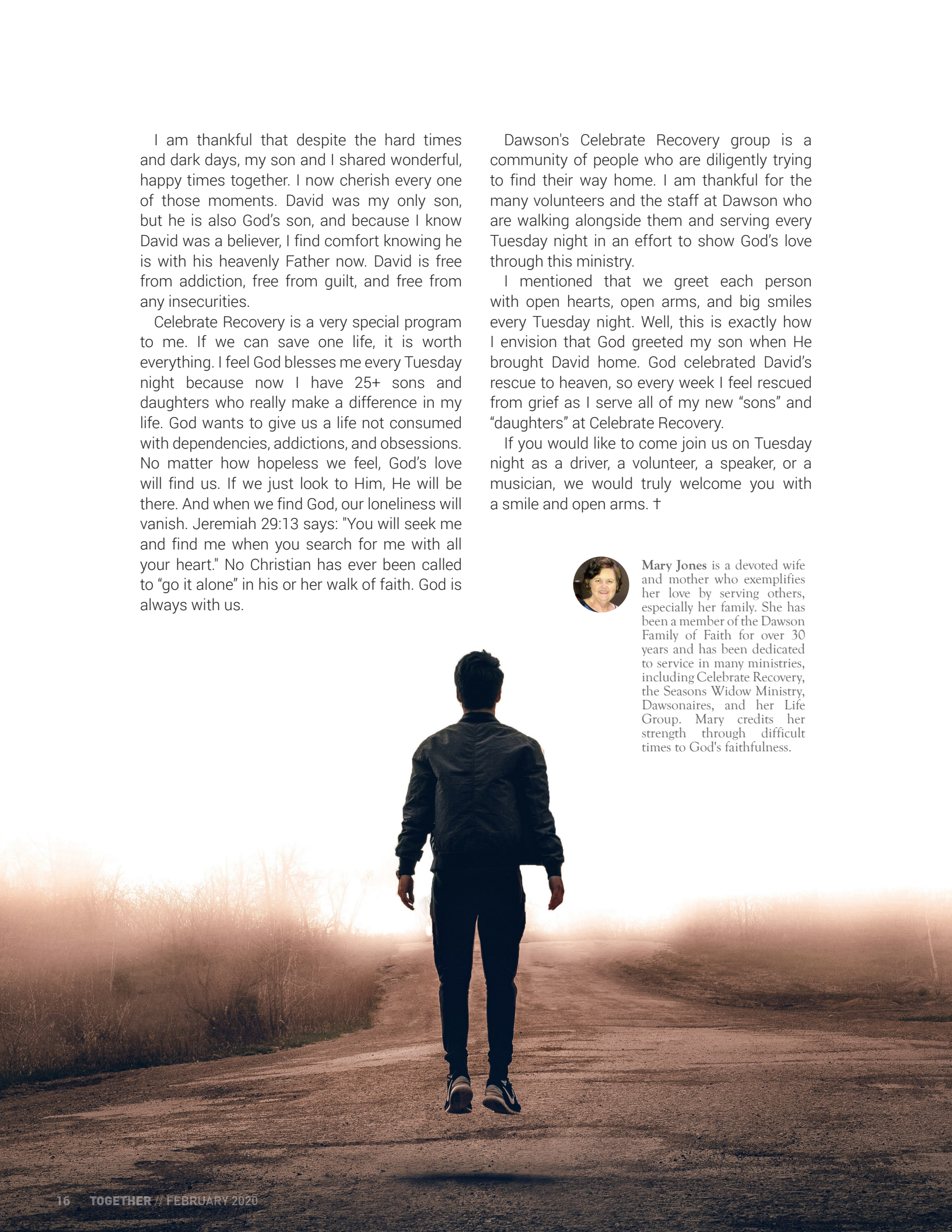
But he had a demon that challenged him every single day, the demon of alcohol. He was a follower of Jesus and hated what this addiction was doing to him. He tried with every fiber in his body to stop, but the addiction was more powerful than his ability to surrender it to God. He lost his dream job because of the addiction, and his marriage eventually crumbled as well.

For more than 10 years, I spent countless hours with him in hospitals and in many rehab facilities, encouraging him and praying that he would be able to live without dependency on alcohol. It seemed at one point he was really turning a corner. He found a new job that he really enjoyed and had gotten involved in a Men's Small Group Bible Study. We were all so encouraged, especially me. Little did I know the demon was not gone. The struggles were still there, even though he was fighting the good fight to resist the temptations.

At the end of the day, I lost my son. David had his Small Group friends lifting him up, encouraging him, walking the battle with him, but one night, he chose to join a different group of friends; friends that shared the same addiction that he had. That night, David left the house to go out to dinner with these people, but he never came home. The next time I saw my son was the day we buried him.

A mother's love for her son is a precious thing, and God's love for us is even more precious. I am grateful that I felt God's presence, strength, and guidance throughout this tumultuous journey.

CONTINUED



I am thankful that despite the hard times and dark days, my son and I shared wonderful, happy times together. I now cherish every one of those moments. David was my only son, but he is also God's son, and because I know David was a believer, I find comfort knowing he is with his heavenly Father now. David is free from addiction, free from guilt, and free from any insecurities.

Celebrate Recovery is a very special program to me. If we can save one life, it is worth everything. I feel God blesses me every Tuesday night because now I have 25+ sons and daughters who really make a difference in my life. God wants to give us a life not consumed with dependencies, addictions, and obsessions. No matter how hopeless we feel, God's love will find us. If we just look to Him, He will be there. And when we find God, our loneliness will vanish. Jeremiah 29:13 says: "You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart." No Christian has ever been called to "go it alone" in his or her walk of faith. God is always with us.

Dawson's Celebrate Recovery group is a community of people who are diligently trying to find their way home. I am thankful for the many volunteers and the staff at Dawson who are walking alongside them and serving every Tuesday night in an effort to show God's love through this ministry.

I mentioned that we greet each person with open hearts, open arms, and big smiles every Tuesday night. Well, this is exactly how I envision that God greeted my son when He brought David home. God celebrated David's rescue to heaven, so every week I feel rescued from grief as I serve all of my new "sons" and "daughters" at Celebrate Recovery.

If you would like to come join us on Tuesday night as a driver, a volunteer, a speaker, or a musician, we would truly welcome you with a smile and open arms. †



Mary Jones is a devoted wife and mother who exemplifies her love by serving others, especially her family. She has been a member of the Dawson Family of Faith for over 30 years and has been dedicated to service in many ministries, including Celebrate Recovery, the Seasons Widow Ministry, Dawsonaires, and her Life Group. Mary credits her strength through difficult times to God's faithfulness.



Celebrate Recovery®

Celebrate Recovery is a Christian recovery ministry that began at Saddleback Church in California more than 25 years ago. Each week, 20 to 30 participants and leaders gather on Tuesday nights for a meal and time of worship, teaching, and sharing. We are grateful for the opportunity God has given Dawson to provide Celebrate Recovery in this community and are excited about its continued growth through Christ-centered recovery. If you or someone you love is facing the challenges of addiction, please contact Kristen Torres at ktorres@dawsonchurch.org for more information on the Celebrate Recovery Ministry at Dawson.

Celebrate Recovery's Eight Recovery Principles The Road to Recovery Based on the Beatitudes

- (Step 1) **R**ealize I'm not God; I admit that I am powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing and that my life is unmanageable.
"Happy are those who know that they are spiritually poor." Matthew 5:3a TEV
- (Step 2) **E**arnestly believe that God exists, that I matter to Him and that He has the power to help me recover.
"Happy are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Matthew 5:4 TEV, NIV
- (Step 3) **C**onsciously choose to commit all my life and will to Christ's care and control.
"Happy are the meek." Matthew 5:5a TEV
- (Step 4 & 5) **O**penly examine and confess my faults to myself, to God, and to someone I trust.
"Happy are the pure in heart." Matthew 5:8a TEV
- (Step 6 & 7) **V**oluntarily submit to any and all changes God wants to make in my life and humbly ask Him to remove my character defects.
"Happy are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires." Matthew 5:6a TEV
- (Step 8 & 9) **E**valuate all my relationships. Offer forgiveness to those who have hurt me and make amends for harm I've done to others when possible, except when to do so would harm them or others.
"Happy are the merciful." Matthew 5:7a TEV; "Happy are the peacemakers." Matthew 5:9 TEV
- (Step 10 & 11) **R**eserve a daily time with God for self-examination, Bible reading, and prayer in order to know God and His will for my life and to gain the power to follow His will.
- (Step 12) **Y**ield myself to God to be used to bring this Good News to others, both by my example and my words.
"Happy are those who are persecuted because they do what God requires." Matthew 5:10 TEV

If you or someone you know is struggling with addiction, please visit dawsonchurch.org/CelebrateRecovery to learn more about the program.



OUR BETA INTERNS

By **Blake Jenkins** | Minister to College Students

BETA n: [a] a specific, step-by-step description of a sequence or climb in mountain climbing; [b] often vital information to get through a particularly difficult section. [c] information about the specific moves for a climb.

The college years can be both exhilarating and daunting. During this pivotal season, students are looking forward (hopefully and prayfully) and are exploring next steps to get where they believe God is leading them.

As exhilarating and freeing as this time is, the journey is full of unfamiliar terrain with varied obstacles and difficulties. It can feel like attempting to summit a mountain without gear or any sort of idea of where to even start the ascent.

BETA is a program to help equip and guide college students in the midst of their current season while setting them up for fruitfulness in the next. As partners in this program, they have the opportunity to learn from gifted and

skilled pastors, ministers, and directors who have climbed (and are still climbing) in their respective fields. We mentors will help them navigate through the different paths of ministry that they are exploring, while also learning from them as they help us chart new paths.

In BETA, our students are a part of something bigger that will outlast their time in college. Here are the members of our Charter Class along with a few fun facts below. †



Ben Hewitt
College Ministry

Ben is from Tampa, Florida, and plans to graduate from Samford University in May 2020 with a degree in History and Religion. After graduation, Ben would like to pursue a seminary degree and will also be getting married this summer.



Brooke Warden
Student Ministry

Brooke is originally from Picayune, Mississippi, and studies sociology at Samford. She is an avid tea drinker and a firm believer in always reading more books.



Jacqueline Bye
Kids Ministry

Jacqueline, a Montgomery, Alabama, native, is an Elementary Education major at UAB. When she is not shooting off confetti cannons around Dawson, she is petting every dog she sees.



Julianna Smith
Student Ministry

Julianna is from Birmingham, Alabama, and attends Samford, where she studies Early Childhood/Special Education and Ministry. When she is not at Dawson, you can find her at a bookstore, thrifting, or getting coffee with students!



Hannah Creel
Music & Worship

Hannah is from Morris, Alabama, and is a sophomore at Samford University, where she studies Music Education with a concentration on Vocal/Choral. When she isn't in the music building, she enjoys cooking and discovering new music.



Payton Rackley
Kids Ministry

Payton is a native Texan studying Psychology and Spanish at Samford University. In her spare time between classes and church, she loves to read and continues her search for the most authentic Mexican food in Birmingham.



Jackson Vaughan
Music & Worship

Jackson is a junior Instrumental Music Education major at Samford University. He is from Birmingham, Alabama, and when he's not in class (or the practice room), you can usually find him at Chipotle.



David Ivester
Student Ministry

David is from Huntsville, Alabama, and attends Birmingham-Southern College. He is studying Business Administration with a concentration in Management. When he is not at Dawson, David is working out or practicing with the football team at Birmingham-Southern.



Morgan Champion
Communications

Morgan is from Charleston, South Carolina, and majors in Religion at Samford. She hopes to work in ministry and spread the light of Jesus. Morgan loves spending time with her friends and family and especially loves anything Disney.



Cole Frier
Student Ministry

Cole is from Lake City, Florida, and studies Business Marketing with a minor in Biblical Studies at Samford. Cole wants to pursue ministry after college. You can always find him with a cup of coffee nearby.



Olivia Griffin
Communications

Olivia is from Atlanta, Georgia, and attends Samford University, where she studies Graphic Design. When she is not at Dawson you can find her at Cookie Fix in Homewood. Her favorite flavor is the Plain Jane (*wink wink*).



Jacob Lindsey
Media

Jacob is from Vestavia, Alabama, and attends Samford University, where he studies Business/Pre-law. He always has a camera in his hand, ready to capture the moment.

A SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE AND FORTUNATE EVENTS

A PERSONAL YEAR IN REVIEW

By **Linda Atchison**

Lemony Snicket's *Series of Unfortunate Events* by Daniel Handler was my oldest son's first favorite book series in elementary school. As I pondered over 2019, I remembered this story about three orphans and their "unfortunate events." They were fearful of almost everything that came their way in light of their parent's sizeable inheritance. The more I thought about it, 2019 was a series of both fortunate and unfortunate events for me as well. In similar fashion to the orphans, events would happen that I would find totally overwhelming at the time, and yet, clearly providentially scheduled. Through it all, I would come to understand the Holy Spirit on an entirely new level.

The year began with fortunate event number one and with the happy announcement of the engagement of my youngest son, Chris! The wedding date was only six months away. Chris' fiancée, Debbie, is from Germany, so what I'd imagined as my role as Mother of the Groom quickly doubled as I filled in for Debbie's mother. Early in the planning we found out that six of Debbie's family members would be staying in our home the week before the wedding as was their custom in Germany. I knew I would need to be an integral part of the planning, but



I lacked the finesse of an experienced diplomat. A week with strangers who were about to become family would definitely be a memorable experience.

My husband Paul and I are empty nesters, and we had finally mastered a successful "team concept" to life, which was painfully molded by 32 years of compromise and mediation. This area would prove to be the backbone of how the Holy Spirit would manifest His work in the both of us!

As we began to plan and prepare our home for the wedding visitors and also for the event, I felt completely overwhelmed both by the wedding planning and also for the required hospitality needed of our home. Paul and I would work together in ways we never had before, because we knew we were completely dependent on God. He is good for what He promises. Throughout the wedding process, God never failed to give the peace that helped produce patience, kindness, and organization, in a totally new way.

Fortunate event number two was when we rescued our dog, Bruno, in March. We knew this was the right thing to do in the circumstances, but it added to the already full balancing act that we were attempting. And summer was coming!

I have always been extremely committed to serving during KidLife Week and also for Hispanic VBS, so I felt strongly that I should not delete these very important events to make room in my schedule, even though the "destination" wedding (Columbiana, Alabama 4-H Center) was on August 24 and not far away. God, again, as usual, gave me the time to prepare my Bible lessons and also joy in teaching them whenever I asked Him for it. This brought on a new revelation for me. I learned to be open to using time in the way God prompted instead of my self-willed, iron-clad daily to-do list. How much easier God made it when I was pliable to His direction!

As the calendar pulled us closer to the wedding day, there were many unknown things yet to come. Unfortunately, my 89 year-old mother, Pat Brown, had been in declining health since January. She was living independently in Guntersville (where my only sister lives as well). Decisions concerning her care and daily living arrangements required me to be there much more frequently than I had been before. Paul and I also sensed that we needed to spend as much time with her as we possibly could.

As we experienced the tsunami of life responsibilities, I intentionally sought God daily. I wish I had been so faithful in the first 46 years of my Christian life. Keeping my eyes focused on Him made all the difference. The peace and freedom was pervasive and allowed me to enjoy the abundant blessings around me. Only God could help me know the most important things to deal with and where best I could serve.

Our wedding event details (including our house guests) went off without a hitch. Well, maybe with a few hitches, but those were fixed by a great wedding planner. And now I was expecting to be relieved from all of the pressures from the past few months, but that wasn't meant to be.

On Sunday, September 15, we awoke to the sound of burst pipes in an upstairs bathroom. Fortunately, we were able to cut the water off in time to limit the damage to the den ceiling. However, just over a week later, my Mom died on September 21, and we buried her on September 27.

The emotional landscape of planning a funeral and burying your last remaining parent is uncharted territory and requires a special type of coping. As always, my Life Group was a great support to me. I had committed my home as the location for a large wedding tea for a dear friend and her precious daughter on September 29. Again, God showed Himself faithful through the many hostesses doing their parts, in their giftedness, which made the celebration a success.

One last thing I'll share is so ironic. A sweet friend of mine had family obligations that conflicted with a Bible study she was scheduled to lead. She asked if I would be willing to substitute for her for those six weeks. Guess what the study was about? The Holy Spirit! Since I had just lived a "life class" on being solely dependent on Him, I felt that God had equipped me to lead the study with a fresh understanding of His role in our lives.

Please understand that my life is not "perfect" now, and that I'm not always totally obedient to the Holy Spirit's instruction. The truth is I'm still far from that. The one thing that I do know is that this last year has taught me that God's way is always the best way. I learned that it pleases God for me to lean on Him in all areas of my life. God will sort out what is important from the *ever-so-loudly-shouting* unimportant. Not every decision I made last year was the right one, but I had the confidence that my God was bigger than my circumstances. God did not abandon me when I did make a detour! God's grace abounded. He also gave me great enjoyment in the process, be it happy or sad.

Looking ahead to this new year, I challenge all of us to make leaning into God through the Holy Spirit a daily event. And by doing so, let's see what He teaches us. May we all be able to say that any unfortunate events we encounter were more than what they seemed. †



Linda Atchison has been in Birmingham and a member of Dawson since 1980. She is a CPA who currently serves in the Dawson Finance Office. Linda is married to Paul, and they have two grown sons and two new daughters-in-law. She enjoys the great outdoors, reading, and a good Bible study.



MY DAWSON NEIGHBOR

By **Melinda Rainey Thompson**

Early one morning as I dashed toward the gym from my car, virtually unrecognizable to the world with my scraped-back pony tail, inch-thick glasses, and no make-up, (I hope you are getting the full mental picture of this, because only Jesus and a dog could love me in this state) a friend called out to me from the sidewalk.

"How are those Baptists treating you?" she shouted in a way-too-loud voice for 6:15 a.m.

"What do you mean?" I responded in a much more appropriate decibel for pre-dawn conversation.

"You're Episcopalian!" she pointed out, as if I didn't know this already. "You think they're going to let you in?"

That encounter got me thinking, which almost always leads to trouble, or at the very least, an essay, article, or if I really can't help it, a book. I'm a writer. One phrase or something I witness or overhear can infect my imagination like an overactive virus, and I have to get it down on paper—or my laptop, to be precise. Although my handwriting leaves something to be desired, I can fly across a keyboard.

Real writers do not sit at beautiful desks in front of stained-glass windows sipping steaming mugs of tea waiting for God to send something down from a mountaintop, just in case you were wondering. Inspiration usually comes at the most inconvenient

times—when I'm trapped in a dark movie theater and have to crawl across the laps of moviegoers to scratch a few lines on the back of my ticket before I forget them or at 3 o'clock in the morning when I am lying awake beside my husband who is sleeping peacefully.

The pre-dawn hours are when my worries bubble up, real worries, like whether my children are texting and driving, and also insignificant ones like whether or not I have enough cookies for the baby shower. I worry about my children, my aging parents, and work. I worry about what the world is coming to. In those dark hours, I can't even pray. I can only repeat, over and over, "Please, Lord." That's when I begin to write. The first draft is always in my head.

Last winter, I had a terrible accident. I slipped on a sheet of ice and shattered my knee cap. After surgery and physical therapy, I was told to join a gym. I didn't want to. Every step hurt.

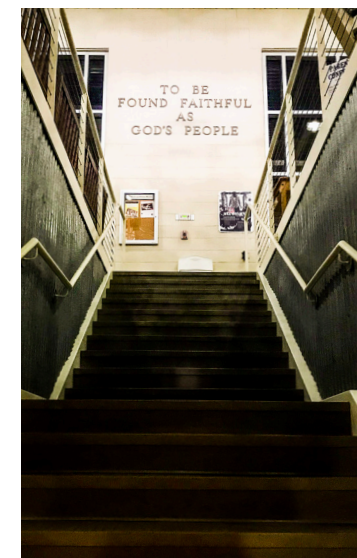
I joined Dawson's Family Recreation Center because I live in the neighborhood, and the gym is reasonably priced, safe, easy to navigate, and welcomes everyone, regardless of age or fitness level. (I'm not the only woman in black leggings and a really big shirt!) I've found encouragement there among staff and patrons, friends who've reared their children alongside mine, folks I've worked with in school concession stands, or sat by at the pool or park.

I've lived in Homewood for more than 30 years. I can see our tiny, first house from the one we live in today. Our family is a part of the community, and we've learned over the years that Dawson is a good neighbor.

My first encounter with Dawson was 20 years ago. Church members helped my elderly neighbors take down their Christmas tree. I never forgot that. I've watched Dawson answer the question of who is my neighbor again and again—by feeding the hungry, reaching out to Spanish-speaking mothers and children, taking loads of kids to camp, and by providing young men with courts for early-morning basketball games.

When I exercise, I love to hear their back-and-forth ribbing of one another. It reminds me of my own children.

For a while after the accident, I could only ride a stationary bike. Now, I walk on the elevated path in the gym 28 times around the court, two miles, and I watch the clouds and people through the large windows. I've observed little acts of kindness that have moved me to tears—help for an elderly woman who could not park her car, a bike accident where an older child comforted a younger one, and a man who pulled over to buy a warm cup of watery lemonade just because a kid was selling it.



After a few months, something happened. To distract myself from the pain, I began to pray as I walked.

At first, I used prayers that were familiar to me from *The Book of Common Prayer* and the liturgy I participate in every Sunday morning in my own parish, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church. I prayed for the poor, those who mourn, the dying, the friendless, the hungry, the homeless, and for those who are alone. I prayed for my family, my church, our community, our country, and for people all over the world. I prayed for you. Each lap became a prayer litany, a labyrinth of meditation.

For me, working out at Dawson became a form of worship, a dedicated time for prayer. The words chiseled over the front entrance to the FRC say:

"To Be Found Faithful As God's People." Dawson has been a faithful neighbor to this Episcopalian, a friend, and a much-needed prayer partner.

The Baptists did, indeed, let me in. I'm grateful. †



Melinda Rainey Thompson is the best-selling author of five books. Her new book, *If I Were The Boss of You*, has just been released. Melinda is an author and speaker and is an Assistant Lecturer in English at Birmingham-Southern College.

A Grandparent's Influence

By Jim Gifford

I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

2 Timothy 1:5

If Timothy's grandmother, Lois, had not been faithful in passing on her faith to her daughter, Eunice, and her grandson, Timothy, we probably would not have 1 and 2 Timothy in the Bible today. This is a good generational example of the importance of passing on the faith to future generations. Lois is our forerunner who modeled grandparenting for us.

As grandparents, we have a crucial role to fill. According to God's word, God wants grandparents to focus on passing on a godly legacy to the next generation. We can do that as we intentionally tell future generations how God has walked with us and demonstrated His mighty works in our lives.

We love to give gifts to our grandchildren. The greatest and most lasting gifts we can give them is to pray and demonstrate for them God's love and faithfulness. The material things we might leave for our children and grandchildren are temporary; however, our prayers and examples can make a significant impact on them for a lifetime. Our greatest blessings will come when we see God answering our prayers in their lives.

What a blessing it would be for me to hear my grandchildren say, "I want to have a relationship with the Lord like my grandfather modeled for me." I hope I can say in the years to come, *"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children and grandchildren are walking in the truth"* (3 John 1:4).

Grandparents, while the world whispers in our ears that it's time to retire and relax, we have an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of our grandchildren and leave a lasting legacy for our family that will bless generations to come.

Ask yourself these questions: What kind of memories will my grandchildren have of me? Do I want my grandchildren to imitate my spiritual life? Will they want my Jesus? †



Jim Gifford is a 39-year veteran of ministry, having served in a variety of roles. As Dawson's Minister to Adults, Jim equips adults to be disciple-makers engaged in expanding God's kingdom. Jim is married to Dorinda, the love of his life, and they have three children and four grandchildren. In their free time they enjoy camping and traveling adventures.

GRANDPARENTING MATTERS!

SEMINAR

Friday, February 28
& Saturday, February 29

SEMINAR SCHEDULE

Friday Evening

6:30 p.m. **Session 1** - The Amazing Influence of a Grandparent
Session 2 - What the Bible Says About Grandparenting
8:30 p.m. Fellowship (Resource Center Open)

Saturday Morning

8:00 a.m. Doors Open & Coffee with Pastries
8:30 a.m. **Session 3** - Reaching the Heart of Your Grandchild
Session 4 - Overcoming the Barriers of Distance
10:30 a.m. Fellowship (Resource Center Open)
10:50 a.m. **Session 5** - The 8 Best Practices of Christian Grandparents
Session 6 - Becoming an Intentional Christian Grandparent
12:30 p.m. Dismiss (lunch on your own)

Register at dawsonchurch.org/ItMatters.

35 YEARS AND COUNTING!

By Christi Cowan

There are a few things that might surprise you about Linda Hillyer, Dawson's Administrator of Membership & Records. She enjoys painting, she appreciates modern technology, and she's a bit of a daredevil. For her 65th birthday, Linda celebrated by riding all of 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 will garner another milestone this year. In February, Linda will celebrate 35 years of working at Dawson. Linda's job entails keeping accurate member records with all contact information, granting and requesting church membership letters, and keeping up-to-date lists of Life Group attendance. She also provides help in the Finance Department with the weekly offering, and she is always eager to support other administrative assistants with mailing lists.

It goes without saying that Linda has seen quite a few changes over the years, from staff and buildings to ministries and technology. When first on staff in 1977, Linda worked with the Single's Director before taking on the Membership duties. In those days, physical filing systems filled a wall and were accessed by several assistants who worked in the same room. "When I first came, we didn't have computers," she said. "We used typewriters." Things are easier now, she says, since finding and updating membership records requires only a few clicks within Dawson's digital system.

After nearly six years in that role, Linda left to work with her husband, Billy, who was the principal at a local Christian school. Soon after, they nearly moved to Florida for a job offer but decided to stay since they were nearing the end of the adoption process. Three days after they declined that offer, they found out that they were about to become parents to a baby girl.

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, 35 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 35 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."

One of the initial draws to Dawson for Linda and her family was the availability of programs for children. These days, Linda appreciates the diversity of the people who make Dawson their family of faith and the fact that 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."

While many things have come and gone in the past 35 years, some of Linda's favorite additions have been the stained glass window in the baptistry and the ceiling mural in the Vestibule. Although, Linda has seen other things come and go, the basic bonds of friendship have stayed put. Linda and Billy are a part of the Lenora Pate and Judy Mason Life Group, where they have always found encouragement and support. As a group, they study the Bible, pray for one another, and volunteer together. Linda and Billy also taught 4-year-old Sunday School for eight years and enjoyed every minute of it.

Linda's coworkers point out that she is a very caring and giving person, and someone who is very dedicated to her job. Receptionist Alice Harris said, "She's a friend that will stand beside you, and if you need her for any reason, day or night, she would come. I treasure her friendship." Business Administrator Randy Poe added, "It's so rare, for the world we live in, to have an employee for 35 years. Linda's knowledge, experience, and history with Dawson are invaluable, and we are so blessed to have her as a staff member."

Linda and Billy live in Homewood with their daughter, Meredith, and granddaughter, Breanna. They are both appreciative for the life they have together and how Dawson has played 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."

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 35 years of service and dedication to Dawson. We are so grateful for you! †

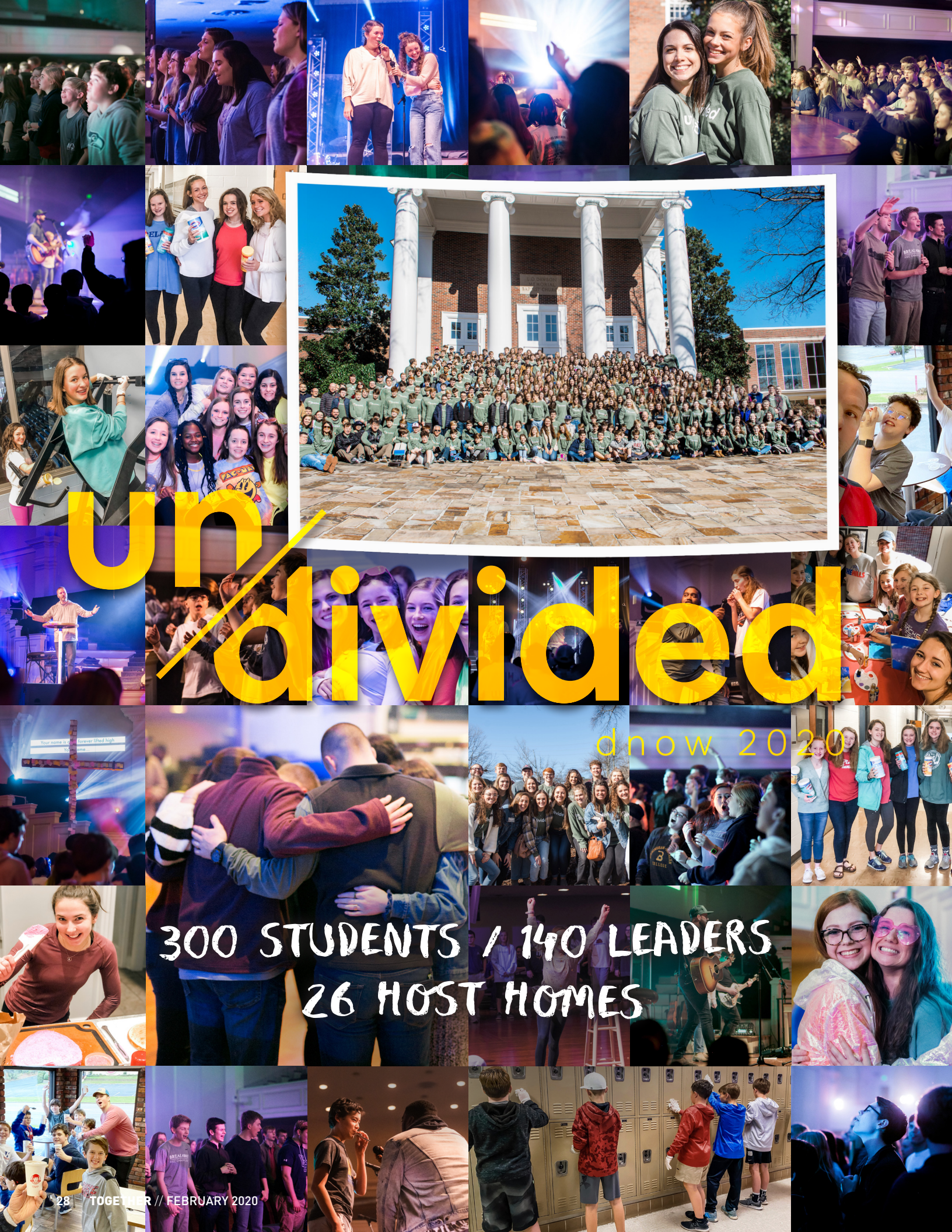


Christi Cowan serves as one of Dawson's graphic designers and also manages the website. She has a background in journalism and print media. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, scrapbooking, and playing with her cats. She loves all things Disney and will probably beat you at Disney trivia.



That's one way to celebrate a 70th birthday a a a a y y !

"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."



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A photograph of four people (two women and two men) seen from behind, embracing each other in a group hug. They are standing outdoors against a bright, hazy background. The image has a warm, orange-toned overlay.

Life's Better Together

THERE'S A LIFE GROUP FOR YOU!

dawsonchurch.org/lifegroups

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