



# HELP IS ON THE WAY

By Justin Wallace

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

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

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

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

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

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

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





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

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

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



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

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

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



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

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

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



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