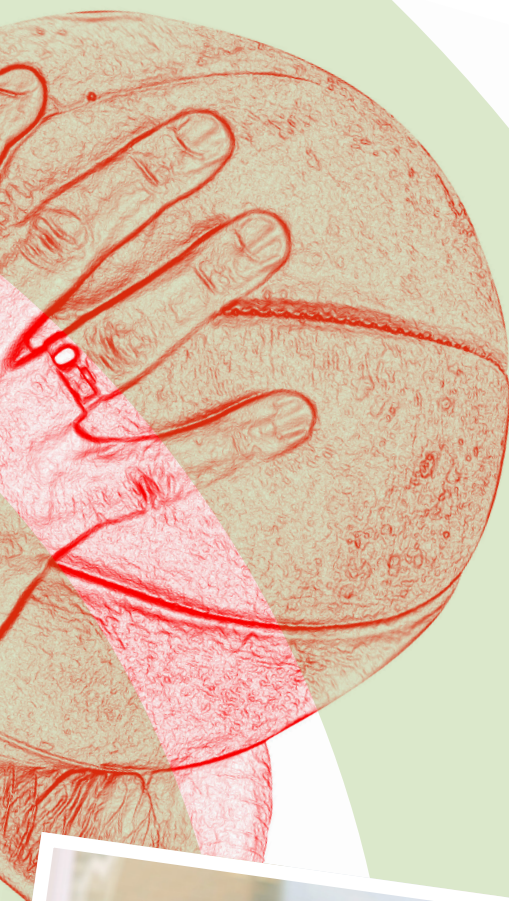


REGGIE, SET, GO!

By Reggie Hatcher | Associate Minister of Recreation





I was born and raised in Birmingham, AL, not only to new parents, but also to newlyweds who happened to be brand new believers in Jesus. I cannot even begin to imagine what it must've been like for my parents to be that young and navigating a tremendous amount of change. As I have gotten older and learned more about my family history, I know that navigating that amount of change with no one to show you godly and healthy ways of doing so made it even more challenging. Mom and Dad wanted a new life, to start off on a different and more secure footing. For them, that was beginning a relationship with Jesus, which meant that the foundation of their new family would be one built on THE Solid Rock.



Reggie with his wife Sarah, and daughters Isla and Hazel.



Reggie (on right) at 8 years old, with his younger siblings, Darius and Shay, in 1997.

We moved a good bit, all around Birmingham, during my childhood. I accepted Christ into my life when I was six or seven. I remember the day I told my mom about my decision like it was yesterday. We were living in a house in the West End neighborhood of Birmingham. I remember us standing in the kitchen right in front of the sink. Surrounded by white walls and brown cabinets, I remember the view outside of the window that day. My decision that day was every bit as real as the God who had (and still is) pursued my heart and drew me to Himself.

What brought me to that moment of making the most important decision of my life you might ask? Let's rewind a little bit. At a young age, you could say that I saw more than I should have. From the beginning, my family struggled financially. My dad was the sole breadwinner, as my mom stayed home with three kids under the age of four once my sister was born. I was too young to understand the full extent of how hard things were, but I knew enough to know that we were struggling. I remember the toll it took on my parents, on their marriage, and even the way they parented us. The house we lived in was next door to a house whose inhabitants sold drugs. I distinctly remember seeing one of the guys who lived next door lying dead in the driveway beside ours. I must have been around eight years old at that time.

I was too young to understand the gravity of where we were living and the why and how we got there, but I was aware that this wasn't an ideal neighborhood to live and grow up in. Experiencing some of the things I experienced and seeing some of the things I saw, I didn't know how to process any of it. I felt enveloped by hopelessness and surrounded by darkness. I needed something to hold onto, an anchor that would not sway no matter where the ship of life took us. I found that in God. Putting my faith in Him didn't change my external circumstances magically, but it gave me a sense of peace I couldn't find anywhere else.

My parents were part of a church that my uncle pastored, and it seemed like we were always there. Looking back, I can see how steeped my family was in "prosperity gospel" theology and the significance that televangelists had made on our lives. As a family struggling financially, I understand now how easy it was to gravitate towards a false gospel that promised us things we didn't currently have, particularly financial wealth. What initially began as seeing Jesus as the ultimate source of hope and peace in the midst of difficulty, became seeing Jesus as the "golden ticket" to the life I wanted us all to have. Faith became transactional. There was very little, if any, acknowledgment of my own sinfulness and a need for a Savior to rescue me. Lacking godly discipleship, I drifted towards a false gospel that would begin to have deep implications in my life.

Families are complicated and messy because people are broken and sinful. I know that's not true of just my family but of every family that exists. The lives we live and the things we struggle with can often be traced, in one way or another, back to family. Through years of counseling and unpacking things from my own life and that of my family's, one thread I have seen consistently present itself is the lack of healthy and Gospel-centered discipleship in my family.

The Lord began
planting seeds for
recreation ministry.



Reggie celebrating his birthday with Shades Mountain Baptist Church Singles Life Group in 2014.

As I grew in my faith and recognized the heresy of the prosperity gospel, I also grew in resentment towards my family for not showing me what it looked like to live a life completely surrendered to God. But how can you offer something you've never had or seen modeled? I had never considered that trusting in the sovereignty of Christ would include my spiritual walk. That part of what Philippians 4:19 meant for my life was that God would meet my spiritual need of discipleship through the local church.

Part of the beauty of the local church is that God uses women and men to help meet the spiritual needs of His people through discipleship. I believe that God used the lack of discipleship from my own family to plant seeds for a call to ministry that would bear fruit later.

It wasn't until I joined Kingwood Church in Alabaster as a high schooler and began to be ministered to by my youth pastor that I experienced, for the first time in my life, Gospel-centered and intentional discipleship. This is when I really started to understand my sinful nature, and why I needed Jesus, and what a relationship with Jesus meant and truly looked like. It was also when the Lord began planting seeds in my heart



A few months after I joined the staff at Shades, I had an amazing opportunity to go on a sports mission trip to Zambia. We worked with a missionary whose basketball ministry was having a deep impact on the area, especially through basketball camps. We spent a week helping young boys and teenagers develop their basketball skills while also sharing the Gospel. Seeing the young men that I was discipling go on this mission trip and be able to share the Gospel through—their own stories—was one of the most deeply impactful experiences I have ever had.

for recreation ministry. I was an avid basketball player, and Kingwood had a gym that was largely unused. I wanted a way to engage friends who were far from God through playing basketball and sharing the Gospel. So Kingwood let me use the gym, and I invited guys I went to high school with and my coworkers from Chick-fil-A to start coming to play with me. With no formal training on how to build a basketball ministry, it ended up just being basketball for a while. But even though there was no Bible Study aspect, relationally it thrived and it gave me the opportunity to have many other conversations with guys about their faith. Eventually this gathering of guys grew to over 80 of them coming each week to play! It was just incredible. For the first time I saw how basketball could draw people to the physical location of a church and the opportunities that it provided that church for ministry.

One thing that I will never forget is attending a particular prayer service at Kingwood. That night, the children's pastor had prophetically prayed over me that, "I would one day have the opportunity to use basketball to fish for men." I didn't understand it at that moment, but it's clear to me now that the Lord began His calling of me into ministry with that prayer.

About that same time, I was preparing to graduate from high school and had applied to only one school: UAB. I really didn't have any sort of vision for my life, much less an idea of what I wanted to study. I had applied for college only because that's what everyone else around me was doing. Even as I was still processing what that children's pastor had prayed over me, I had no clue what that could even look like. In hindsight, as I began my freshman year back in 2008, I was woefully unprepared for the rigors of college. Lacking direction for what I wanted to do with my life didn't help either. Due to a good bit of laziness and absolutely no drive or ambition, I ended up getting academically suspended from UAB two times. The second suspension was for an entire year, and it turned out to be the wake-up call that I needed.

I spent that whole year reevaluating my circumstances and assessing God's plan for my future. As that year came to a close, I felt the Lord leading me towards studying social work. I was excited after officially changing my major in the summer of 2012 and couldn't wait to start back that fall. However, I never could've foreseen the titanic-sized iceberg headed my way that would soon rock my world. Sadly, after a disagreement that could not be resolved, I got kicked out of my parents' house before school even started. I was

faced with either finding another place to live and figuring out a way to continue my education with less support, or dropping out of school completely to work full-time so that I could find a place to live on my own. Unfortunately, I had to choose the latter.

For the longest time, I found myself being embarrassed at sharing the fact that I was academically suspended from college. And not just once, but twice. I was even more embarrassed to tell others that I dropped out of college. But I came to realize that those things are part of my story, and if my story is to be told well, those painful, yet crucial details must be included. All of those details help paint the story that God has been creating since I was a kid. He uses the messiness of life and the unforeseen events that I may have found shameful as a way to display His power and glory in a way that I never could have done on my own. It is also a testament of the goodness of God and His love for us in how He never shames or embarrasses us, even after the worst sins or decisions of our lives.

After I dropped out of college and found a place to live, I also felt like it was time for me to own my faith and for it to become something I would be more intentional about. A deeply important part of that for me was finding a community of people my age who were also committed to following Jesus. People who were, in the words of Eugene Peterson, committed to "a long obedience in the same direction." Like the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19, one invitation changed everything.

I had met one of my best friends, Austin Johnson, at Kingwood Church. He was also a student at UAB. Austin invited me to come check out this singles Bible study at Shades Mountain Baptist Church. It was a mixed group of singles who were either in college about to graduate, in grad school, or had already graduated and were well into their careers.

I would one day have the opportunity to use basketball to fish for men.

Reggie and Austin.



I was surrounded by people who were already or training to be teachers, nurses, doctors, lawyers, financial professionals, and other respectable professions, and here I was just working at Chick-fil-A. I felt out of place in every way. I also felt one of the enemy's greatest tools of shame and embarrassment that I hadn't finished college and was working in fast food, and that, socioeconomically, I wasn't even close to these people. However, this group of people became my friends. They didn't care where I worked or that I hadn't finished college. They loved me the way Jesus taught us to love.

As I began to set roots down in this church with this group of friends, I met a staff member named Logan Creasy. Logan, who would later become one of my best friends, saw a call on my life to ministry and told me that he saw me as a leader in this group of singles. I just couldn't make sense of that! I asked him, "How can someone who doesn't have a college degree be qualified to lead people who have that and more?"

I wish I could say that immediately a light bulb went off and that the prayer that had been prayed over me years before made much more sense, or even that this encouragement from Logan became the catalyst that propelled me forward towards pursuing ministry. But it didn't, at first. I was still weighed down by what I hadn't accomplished, as well as the practicality of not knowing, considering my life circumstances at that time, what a way forward would look like. I was still working at Chick-fil-A and I had no plans of going back to college anytime soon because I didn't have the means or the margin. But thank God for people who are committed to the local church and to discipling and walking with people as they themselves walk with Him. Logan began spending time discipling me, holding me accountable, building me up, and encouraging me to boldly pursue the calling that God had given, despite what my present circumstances had looked like.

Logan wasn't the only person the Lord placed into my life. He sent several other guys into my life who showed me what it looked like to love Jesus, and to lead people and themselves well. They disciplined me and loved me in a way that I hadn't experienced. After about a year of being a part of the singles group at Shades, I officially became a member of the church. I also changed jobs and began working at a credit union. During this time, the Lord used an annual missions celebration at the church to really ignite a fire in me to pursue ministry. And after years of still wondering what that prayer from years ago would lead to, the Lord finally showed me what he had been preparing me for.

In the early part of 2018, I started working part-time at Shades in the Recreation Ministry, helping to launch and build out a new basketball ministry that had just started. Later that year, I began having conversations with the Recreation Minister about coming onto the staff full time. However, one of things the church wanted me to do was to go back and finish my undergraduate degree. The Lord had already been stirring a desire in my heart to do that, but I didn't think I would have the opportunity. For me, this is just a really beautiful part of my story. Here is something that I had been praying for, a chance to accomplish a real dream of mine in finishing my college education, and the Lord is provided it for me through a new ministry opportunity I didn't even see coming.

As I began to pursue re-enrolling back to UAB, there were some legitimate hurdles that existed. It had been 7 years since I was enrolled as a student at UAB. In the fall of 2012, when I dropped out of college to pursue full-time employment, I had already signed up for a full load of classes that semester. I naively believed that the professors would drop me from those classes since I wasn't showing up. Unfortunately, that's not what happened and I discovered that not only did I have four F's on my transcript, but I also owed UAB close to \$5K in tuition and fees! There was no way I could pay that money back any time soon. Even so, I continued with the appeal process, still believing that God was calling me into full-time ministry and trusting Him to do what I thought was impossible—but in the waiting, He was working. It took three months for me to hear back from UAB but not only had my appeal been approved and those four Fs had been removed, but the money I owed UAB was also completely wiped out!



With Logan Creasy.

Logan saw a call on my life to ministry.

The BIG day!



That paved the way for me to be readmitted to UAB, and it gave me an affirmation that God was indeed leading me toward full-time ministry. I began my journey towards graduation in the fall of 2019, which is the same year I became full-time at Shades leading the basketball ministry and some other aspects of Rec Ministry. I met my beautiful wife, Sarah, in May of 2020, and we were married in March of 2021. I officially graduated from UAB in April of 2022, and then by God's grace had the opportunity to join Dawson's staff at the end of February 2023. (When the Lord is directing your path, it's always an exciting journey!)

As you can tell, I've had many detours in my life. Some were certainly of my own doing and my own sinfulness. Some were just because life happened. I love this quote by Lillias Trotter when she says, "One learns as one goes on, not to fear the detours by which God leads on." With every detour I have ever been on I have learned to see how God used those to accomplish His purposes for me. Even the detours that have occurred because I have sinned against our holy God, yet over time, through repentance and turning back to Him and trusting Him with every part of my life (even the ugly parts), God has brought about healing and restoration and new dreams. More importantly, God has shown who He is and His heart for His people. Those detours have led me to where I am today and have led me to serve in the Recreation Ministry at Dawson. I wish I could fully convey how thrilled my family and I are to be serving you (and with you) and alongside such an incredible staff!

When I think about how discipleship has been a common theme in my life, I think of my own little family. I have been married to my amazing wife, Sarah, for almost 3 years now. We met and married during the pandemic. We had our firstborn, a baby girl named Isla, a couple of weeks after my graduation from UAB. We welcomed our second baby girl, Hazel, in mid-October of last year. Sarah is a nurse at Children's Hospital, so our family is like many others with both parents working outside the home. With our two little ones, we know how important it is that the two of us love, respect, and lean on each other as much as possible. God has given us such a gift, and we are so grateful! Most of all, we know the importance of intentionally making God the center of all we do. Without Him, everything else is worthless.

When I think of my growing family and how I am responsible for them, I am reminded of how God has placed this deep



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Reggie with 5th graders at KidLife 2023.

Reggie with newborn Hazel, and Isla (inset).

desire in me to buck the trend of men in my family and to be a husband and father who is intentional about leading his family to Christ boldly and unashamedly. When I think of my wife, I think about how I want to love her the way Christ loves the Church and how I want to join in the work God is already doing to continuously form her each day into His image, not my own ideas of what that should look like. When I think of my daughters, I think of how I want them to grow into beautiful young women who are all-in on following Jesus as their Savior and how I want them to see that modeled by both of their parents.

And then there's me. What do I want discipleship to look like in my own life as I lead my family? Based on Deuteronomy 6:5-9,

I simply want to point them all back to Jesus in my everyday living. In the monotony and in the excitement. In the mountain highs and deep-sea lows. In what I prioritize, and what I say and do. By being faithful to everything He has called me to and by modeling for my family how to do the same.

May we all be found faithful in the amazing work that the Lord has called each of us to.



Reggie Hatcher serves as Dawson's Associate Minister of Recreation and lives in Homewood with his wife, Sarah, and daughters, Isla and Hazel. In his spare time, Reggie enjoys playing pickleball and spending time with his family. He is currently working on his Masters of Arts and Pastoral Ministry at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.