

Life Group Stories

By Jennifer Cleveland



L I F E L O N G J O U R N E Y O F F A I T H

Our church has always embraced ministering to all age groups. My husband has been part of Dawson and part of a Life Group since birth—though it was known as Sunday School back then! I joined Dawson through Steve Donaldson's Singles Class in 1989, and together, Bill and I were part of the inaugural "Together for Life" Life Group that Dawson established. Our family has embraced nearly every stage of Life Group offerings available at Dawson.

A few years ago, we entered the "Empty Nester" phase of life and became members of the Dorrill/Marlin/Reese Life Group. This was a wonderful opportunity for us to connect with others in our life stage who were equally interested in growing their faith and service. We imagined we would remain in this class indefinitely, surrounded by our friends. However, our trajectory shifted when Boyd and Melissa Kaiser reached out to invite us to pray about creating a new class specifically for "almost" or "new" empty nesters. This core group would consist of couples from the newlywed Life Group class that Bill and I had taught for 13 years (2000–2013).

In 2000, Jan Jones approached us to help teach a class of nearly or newlywed couples who had just completed the Together for Life program. We were currently members of J.C. and Pat Herring's Young Adult Life Group. J.C. had been encouraging us to teach/

serve at Dawson. So without hesitating, we agreed to help teach this newlywed class. At that time, our son, Andrew, was two years old, and our daughter Mary Katherine was nine months. We felt we were so "experienced" in marriage and were eager to guide these "honeymoon" couples. To our surprise, we found ourselves growing spiritually and emotionally alongside our class, perhaps even more so than they were.

Over the years, we taught this class with Kit and Keith Waters, Bob and Barbara Gladney, and Joe and Kathy Daniel, witnessing the birth of our members' children and supporting them through significant life changes—job transitions, moves, and family milestones. Several couples, including the Kaisers, became deeply involved in our church community. By 2013, as Bill and I transitioned into working with the Student Ministry (since our children were now teenagers) we encouraged our couples to explore other Life Groups. They embraced this opportunity, stepping into leadership roles for preschool, children, students, and adult classes, while maintaining close friendships with those who had supported them through life's joys and sorrows.

As this core group of newlyweds began to transition into empty nesters, the desire to reconnect arose. They decided it was time to "get the band back together" and bring along their friends seeking to engage in an adult

class. Boyd and Melissa assumed the leadership roles of the newly formed class, enlisting Tim and Theresa Simpson, who had just returned from overseas, and Paul and Julie Hughes, experienced teachers from Dawson's Student Ministry.

Boyd and Melissa reached out not only to many of our former newlywed class but also to other couples involved in teaching across various Life Groups. They welcomed newcomers to Birmingham and couples seeking community post-COVID.

On September 7, 2025, we held our first class with over 40 attendees! Since then, we have developed vibrant prayer, mission, and social ministries, with many individuals stepping into leadership roles. I have relished the opportunity to reconnect with old friends and form new relationships. The excitement within this group is palpable; each Sunday at 9:45, our class is energized and ready to connect with one another and deepen our relationship with Christ. It has truly been a lifelong journey of faith for my family, the many Life Groups we have been a part of, and our church community.

We warmly invite you to visit and join us anytime!



Jennifer Cleveland has been a member of Dawson for over 35 years. She has served in many areas including Life Group Leader, Sanctuary Choir, and the Finance Team. She and her husband, Bill, have two children, Andrew (27) and Mary Katherine (25).