

Together

May 2021

AT DAWSON



KIDS CONNECTION
Celebrates 10 years!

MINDFUL
Moments Over Tea

One Woman's
MINISTRY
in the Middle-East

Meet
Our New
Minister
to Students

PRAYING
For Revival

KidLife's
EPIC
Road Trip

SUMMER
Schedule



Life's Better Together

There's a Life Group for you!

PRESCHOOL
KIDS
STUDENTS
COLLEGE
YOUNG ADULTS
ADULTS

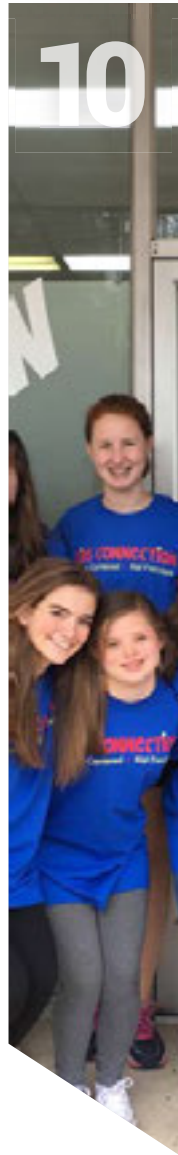
dawsonchurch.org/lifegroups

Together

AT DAWSON

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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

WATCH LIVE

live.dawsonchurch.org



dawsonchurch.org/AfterThoughts

From



Dr. David Eldridge
Senior Pastor

Pastor David

Dear Church Family,

By the time you read this edition of the *Together At Dawson* magazine, summer will be near. For many students and teachers, the last day of school will be a welcome relief to an extremely long school year. This summer promises newness and respite from the school and work year behind us. The words of John Updike remind us of the promise of this summer season ahead:

*The sun is rich
And gladly pays
In golden hours,
Silver days,*

*And long green weeks
That never end.
School's out. The time
Is ours to spend.*

*There's Little League,
Hopscotch, the creek,
And, after supper,
Hide-and-seek.*

*The live-long light
Is like a dream,
And freckles come
Like flies to cream.*

There are days at the pool, and family vacations being planned. There are long, sweaty days on baseball fields, and summer jobs right around the corner. I'm grateful to serve with you where the joy of summer is connected to the rich ministry of our church. Last year's summer was one of adaptation and cancellations. However, our *Together at Dawson* magazine reminds us all of the rich days of ministry ahead for every age. We eagerly look forward to what God is going to do this summer in and through the camps, Chapel Choir Mission Tour, KidLife, and other ministry events that you will see on the calendar. So, let's move forward, leaning into what God has in store for us in the days and weeks ahead.

"Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." Isaiah 43:19

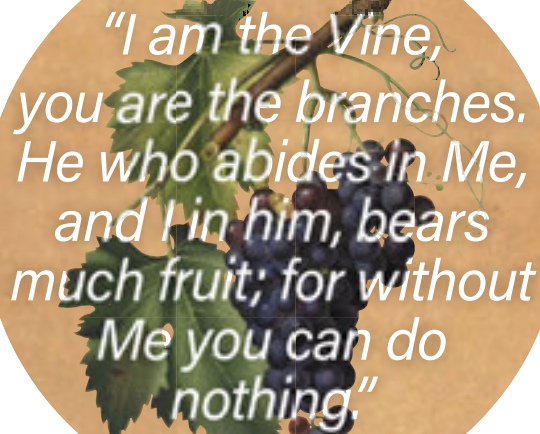
Blessings,

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

PRAYING FOR REVIVAL

by Jim Averett



*"I am the Vine,
you are the branches.
He who abides in Me,
and I in him, bears
much fruit; for without
Me you can do
nothing."*

John 15:5

In a year filled with a deadly pandemic, a divided country, and many other unprecedented occurrences, it's not surprising that many of God's people have been calling for a revival. What does REVIVAL look like to you? Is it a specific time set aside by a church to hold multiple services across several days? Or is it a time when heartfelt prayers are offered up to God asking Him to bring salvation to those who don't know Jesus as their Lord and Savior? Or is it a time when members of our family or church family are on our knees fasting and praying in unison for the Holy Spirit to work in and through our congregation? I think it is all of the above.

God's Word says: Will You not revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You? Show us Your mercy, LORD, and grant us Your salvation (Psalm 85:6–7).

Oh, that we would want to rejoice in our Lord! We all desire to see ourselves, our families, our churches, and our nation revived in our worship and adoration of the Lord, but we cannot, in our own strength, revive ourselves. Only God can do that.

What happens when God revives us? The short answer is "more of Him." We spend more time in prayer asking our heavenly Father to move in our hearts, to cleanse us from our sins, and to heal our families, our church, and our nation.

But first, there is a necessary step that must be taken that involves confession. We must all confess our sins and ask God to forgive us for those sins. 1 John 1:9 says: If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. With this posture of humility and the realization of our own unrighteousness before a holy God, our hearts are prepared to do the work of the Church.

Another way our hearts can be revived through prayer is when we pray for those who are lost. Many of us are so faithful to pray for those who are sick. Whether they are in our families, churches, schools, and neighborhoods, we too often fall short on praying for those who we know personally but who have yet to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

(Romans 10:9–10) Praying for the lost is an urgent matter for all Christians. So, why are we not

doing it more? Is it because we have failed to fully understand and appreciate what God's Word says in John 3:16 when it says "shall not perish?" To perish means spending eternity in a place called Hell, eternally separated from God. If we read and understand the passages in Luke 16:19–31 regarding the rich man and Lazarus, surely our prayer lives would increase.

Yes, if God does see fit to answer our prayers and heal that member of our family or our church family, our friends or our neighbors we do realize that they will most likely become sick again and ultimately die physically. However, if we pray for God's salvation of someone and God saves him or her, they are saved for eternity. Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! Nevertheless, it is crucial that as we pray for revival we not minimize our own sins. As we pray and confess our sins, we ask that the Lord will make us clean and hear our prayers. (Isaiah 59:1-2)

Pray for God to revive our hearts, both individually and corporately. Will you please join with us in doing the work of the Church here at Dawson? To learn more, please contact Kristen Torres, Dawson's Minister of Spiritual Development at ktorres@dawsonchurch.org.

"Is anything too hard for the LORD?" Genesis 18:14



Jim Averett and his wife, Mickey, have been members of Dawson since 2004. During that time both have taught children's Life Groups and KidLife. They have two adult daughters and three grandchildren. Jim has also served in the Intercessory Prayer Ministry, is a deacon, and on the Stewardship, Nominating, and Finance Teams.

Life Groupstories

By Lexie Black



Members of the Dawson Young Professionals (DYP) Life Group meet for a flower arranging class.

A study by the Pew Research Center in 2014 reports that only 28% of younger Millennials attend religious services at least once a week. In the local church, fewer and fewer young adults are still active and say they feel committed to a church. Dawson has a Young Adult ministry that is called Dawson Young Professionals (DYP). While this age group and ministry are hard and many churches may struggle with it, the Lord has graciously allowed DYP to grow and become such a constant place of community for so many, including me.

Looking for a church home can be hard when many churches are moving away from “Sunday School” or as we call it, Life Groups, on Sunday morning. It is easy to visit a church on Sunday by going to the worship service then leaving, having not met anyone. Praise God that Dawson sees the value in Life Groups on Sunday mornings where you can come and worship and also be with a group of people looking to “become and help others become faithful servants of Jesus Christ.”

DYP’s Life Group draws young adults to Dawson. If you have never been, let me paint a picture of a Sunday morning with us. Even though the pandemic changed the location of where we would meet some of the time, as soon as you arrived you would see people around ages 22–28 talking and laughing with one another, sharing about the past week. We are taught by several other adults who take turns each week by dividing the teaching

and other responsibilities of leading our group. In DYP, no matter what book of the Bible we are studying, the teaching is authentic, challenging, intentional, and biblically accurate. We are studying the book of Hebrews right now, and I think these verses summarize us well. “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near (Hebrews 10:23–25). Together we look to the hope we share in Christ, and we remind each other of His faithfulness. We encourage one another and pray together as we meet on Sundays and at weekday Bible studies.

Over the past two years, the girls’ Bible study has become the biggest place of community for me. Every week we meet at someone’s house on a Tuesday night. We share a meal together and then read and discuss our chapter for the week. As we go through our study, we discuss what the Lord is teaching us, putting on our hearts, and doing in our lives. We ask hard questions and challenge each other to dig deeper when studying God’s Word. We ask for prayer requests and share praises. This has been so great because we have gotten to see the Lord working in each other’s lives. I am encouraged by doing life with people who struggle just like I do or who are going through similar things.

Finding the right community can be hard. It's not quick, and it's not easy. We often settle for what's easier and less awkward but more lonely. Sometimes it means going when you don't really want to. You have to try and think intentionally, sometimes you invite yourself to stuff. But if you are reading this and looking for community, keep searching and pressing on, because the right one is out there and it is worth it. Community is life-giving, and as members of the body of Christ, we are different yet so much better together. Yes, glory to God for community! I'm really thankful to know these people and to be a part of this Life Group.



DYP Birthday Lunch

DYP has an Instagram page (@Dawson_DYP), which is a source to see what's going on in our ministry. It's also a place to come to just be encouraged and to see how the Lord is working in DYP. My favorite thing about the DYP Instagram is each person's "Why Dawson" post. With each of these posts, the person is asked to answer why they chose Dawson and what they love about DYP. Some of those answers include:

- The leaders and other members are intentional about getting to know everyone.
- This is a great place where you can grow spiritually. With the DYP, not only do I have fellow Christians in the same stage of life as me, but I also have several older and wiser leaders to turn to for guidance.
- Young Adult ministry is one of the harder ministries, but Dawson has done a great job.
- Everyone has a different story, different job, or different struggle. But everyone in DYP is there to love and support each other in their Christian walk.
- The first time I went to a guys Bible study, I knew that this was the community I wanted to be a part of.
- All of us come from different walks of life, working different jobs, and having different lifestyles yet we all still have so much in common.
- DYP is an amazing group of individuals who all have a common passion for glorifying the Lord.

"We ask hard questions and challenge each other to dig deeper when studying God's Word."

Another way you can be a part of DYP is through discipleship. Please reach out and ask how you can get connected with a member of DYP to pour into them. A DYP member would benefit from how you would walk them through a situation and teach them and lead them as you walk alongside each other. We learn from Scripture AND each other's lives. Our testimonies are powerful, and we would love for you to share them with us. We know that Jesus has worked in you and has taught you many things, and there are members in DYP who would love to meet and learn from you. Please consider allowing a DYP member to follow you as you follow Jesus.

I encourage you to be obedient to the call of discipleship.

So what does my Life Group mean to me? DYP is more than just Sunday mornings. While it is a Life Group on Sunday mornings, it's also family dinners at the Hartins' house or Friendsgiving at the McCutchins'. It's girls and guys Bible studies; it's discipleship, it's a Barons baseball game together or pumpkin carving. It's serving within the group and also alongside other Dawson members. It's meeting inside and outside of Dawson with one another to talk about life and God. I feel seen, known, and loved in this group. Here, I can be honest and share prayer requests, and receive biblical encouragement and advice from DYP teachers and the girls from my Bible study. I want to encourage you, whatever age group you are in, to really be vulnerable and present with your Life Group here at Dawson. You will be blessed. Lean in and let the Lord show you the gift He gives that comes from having true community with other Christ followers.



Lexie Black works as a first-grade teacher at Hueytown Primary School and is scheduled to leave for the IMB's Journeyman Program in October 2021. She has a heart for college and young adult ministry and firmly believes that the Lord uses this time in people's lives in a big way for our good and His glory!

STUDYING THE BIBLE ON YOUR OWN

B Y J I M G I F F O R D

You open your Bible, flip through a few pages, and let out a sigh of overwhelm. Studying the Bible can feel intimidating, even scary. I know you want to dive into God's Word. I know you are anxious to learn more. However, you're just not sure where to begin. While studying the Bible can be a challenge, learning about different methods and study tools will make studying the Bible seem more approachable.

There is a sense of empowerment when believers can sit down, read the Bible, and discover truth for themselves. We each grow closer to God in the process. Time spent studying the Bible equips us (2 Timothy 3:16–17). We become more confident in sharing what we know with others and discover that the Word is living and active (Hebrews 4:12) in our daily lives.

Are you ready to embark on a life-changing journey with the God of the universe? Are you ready to learn and grow as the Holy Spirit speaks into your life? Then keep reading because I am going to share with you five methods for how you can study the Bible on your own. As you get started there are a few tools that are helpful, no matter what study method you choose:

- Study Bible (digital or paper)
- pen or pencil
- journal or notebook
- highlighter

For those who prefer to study using a computer or tablet, digital versions of the Bible and resources make in-depth study extremely easy.

Whether you are just starting out or looking for fresh ways to approach your Bible study, let's look at a few study methods to consider. Whichever method you choose, start with prayer, asking God to give you wisdom and new insights.

H.E.A.R. STUDY OF THE BIBLE

This devotional style study method is a simple approach to go with your daily Bible reading. H.E.A.R. stands for Highlight, Explain, Apply, Respond.

1. **Highlight:** one or two verses that speak to you.
2. **Explain:** Write down what you think the text means.
3. **Application:** How can you apply what you have highlighted in your life?
4. **Respond:** Write out a prayer to God based on what you just learned and ask Him to give you opportunities to live out this truth.

STUDY A BOOK OF THE BIBLE

Select a book of the Bible to read through. Each day read through a passage or entire chapter. Then read through a second time and underline keywords and phrases.

1. Write down what God is saying in this chapter and identify a theme.
2. Take a few minutes to identify the spiritual truths or principles in this chapter that are applicable to your life.
3. Finally, write down how you will act on the lessons learned in this passage.
4. As you work through the book of the Bible, create an outline.

TOPICAL

When you want to know what the Bible says about a certain topic, use a concordance to search what the Bible says about it. For example, when you look up the word courage in your concordance, you'll find several references.

1. Select a topic and look it up in a concordance.
2. Choose 10–20 verses on the subject.
3. Read the verses.
4. Write down observations.
5. Make conclusions and identify how you can apply something you've read to your own life and also share it with others.

BIOGRAPHICAL

Did you know that there are more than 3,000 people mentioned in the Bible? The Book of Genesis tells the stories of Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. There are epic tales filled with challenges, heartbreak, and family drama. But that is not the end of the story. Each of their stories illustrates how God met these people and tells of promises He made and fulfilled.

For this method, select a person from the Bible to study. Look at their strengths and weaknesses and consider what could be applicable to your own life. What about them encourages you? Inspires you? A few potential characters to study include Abraham, Sarah, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Ruth, Rahab, Jesus, Mary, Elizabeth, and Paul.

Here are the basic steps.

1. Select a character. Start with someone with a few references you can easily study. Save characters like David and Paul for later.
2. Read the passages of their story and create a timeline.
3. Note their background, key events, relationships, and the challenges they faced.
4. Identify their strengths and weaknesses. Try to imagine what it might have been like to be in their shoes.
5. What biblical truths do you discover while researching this person's life?
6. Write out a personal application for your own life.

As you conclude, ask yourself if you see any of yourself in this person's story. How might God be leading you to make a change or take the next step? What impressed you about their story, and how does it challenge you and your choices?

INDUCTIVE

If you want to take a deep dive into Scripture, along with its historical and cultural context, the inductive method might be right up your alley. This method examines a passage and its context to determine what it says, what it meant to the original audience, and what it means to us today.

1. Start with observation. Approach the passage like a journalist asking the five "W" and "H" questions. As you continue along, note key words, contrasts, and comparisons. Keywords are words that point to biblical truth and are often repeated for emphasis. If there are time and geographical references, write them down.
2. Next, look to interpret the passage to understand the deeper meaning. Ask questions like:
 - a. What is the cultural and/or historical context of this passage?
 - b. What else do I know about the book, author, and broader context of the passage?
 - c. What other Scripture passages might help me better interpret this one?
 - d. Is there anything you have overlooked, and have you made any underlying assumptions that filter your interpretation?
3. Summarize what you see as the clearest meaning of the text based on your research.
4. Finally, you'll want to apply what you have learned. Ask yourself what the biblical truths you have discovered mean to your life, your priorities, and your relationships. This application step can be uncomfortable, for it is where truth and life might conflict. Don't stop; it is important, and it is worth it.

TAKE THE NEXT STEP

If one of these five ways to study God's Word has sparked your interest, take the first step today to engage with God and His Word. Be a doer of the Word and not a hearer only.

What is important is that you engage your heart to meet Jesus through the written Word of God (John 1:1-3). God delights in revealing Himself through His Word. Come with a teachable heart and enjoy the journey!



Jim Gifford serves as Dawson's Discipleship Pastor. His life verse is 2 Timothy 2:2, which reminds him to be steadfast in teaching and discipling others. He and Dorinda are parents to three adult children, and Pops and Dinda to Moses, Birdie, and Loxley.



Pack your bags! We're hitting the road for KidLife 2021!

KidLife Week, our version of VBS, is Dawson's largest outreach event of the year. Each year, Dawson's Preschool Ministry and the Dawson Kids Ministry partner together to create a fun, relevant, exciting week of Bible teaching, worship, and activities. This year's theme is **Epic Road Trip**. Preschoolers and children will share this theme, daily mottos, and a key Bible verse:

**Love the Lord your God with all your heart
and with all your soul and with all your mind
and with all your strength (Mark 12:30).**

Bible lessons and activities are specifically designed for each age group. As preschoolers pretend to take a road trip across the US, they'll take a meaningful journey through God's Word, exploring the life of Jesus and learning to live more like Him every day. 1st-5th graders will journey through God's Word and discover 4 key points: (1) Creation points to God, (2) God's Word is our guide, (2) Jesus is our Savior and Redeemer, and (4) We can talk to God in prayer. The Gospel will be clearly communicated in a kid-friendly way and we are praying that many young people will come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. This is a wonderful and important week for our church, and here are three ways you can be involved:

June 7-11
dawsonchurch.org/kidlife

1. Pray with us.

- Pray for the children who will hear about God's love.
- Pray for the families with children who will attend.
- Pray for the hundreds of volunteers who will faithfully share God's love and Word with more than 1,000 children.
- Pray that God will be at work in each life touched by KidLife 2021.

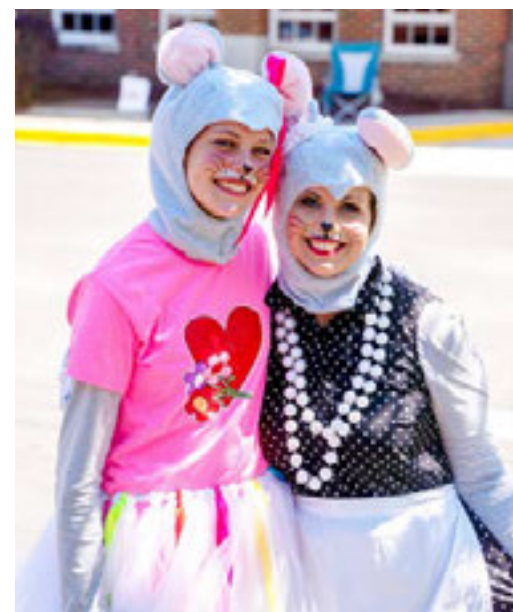
2. Invite your friends & neighbors.

Dawson's KidLife is for children who are age 4 by September 1, 2021 through 5th grade completed. Online registration is now open at dawsonchurch.org/kidlife.

3. Serve with us.

Additional volunteers are still needed for classrooms and special areas for the nursery, preschool, and children.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Registration closes at noon on May 31 or before if all classes are full. **All children must be preregistered** to attend KidLife this year.



For More Details On How You Can Get Involved At KidLife, Please Contact

Brooke Gibson

Minister to Preschoolers | bgibson@dawsonchurch.org

Danielle Bell

Minister to Children | dbell@dawsonchurch.org



KIDS CONNECTION

A DECADE OF CONNECTIONS

By Alice Elmore

What were you doing **10** years ago?

That would be hard to answer for most people, but some Dawson members can recall the early days of a ministry that began to take shape a decade ago. When Dr. Gary Fenton tasked Ben Hale, Dawson's Evangelism and Missions Pastor, with creating a ministry to serve local needs, Ben, along with Tom Thompson, former Minister of Stewardship, discovered that there were few resources for children. So the work began on a new ministry which aimed to fill a gap in the physical needs of Birmingham-area children— known today as Kids Connection.

In the 10 years since, God has worked through the connections made, allowing the ministry and its volunteers to meet needs, voice prayers, and experience blessings in ways that could not be foreseen in 2011. During that year, a building was secured and renovated, a leadership team was gathered, volunteers were recruited, and donations began coming in. Dawson committed one percent of its annual operating budget to the ministry.

In spring 2012, Kids Connection opened to families who shopped with a retail volunteer, gathering clothes, shoes, books, and toys for each child, all at no cost to them. Then each parent or caregiver spent time with a volunteer who provided spiritual support, prayed with them, learned more about their families' needs, and simply served as a listening ear.

Retail and spiritual support helpers are still the faces clients see today. But behind the scenes, many others put their gifts and willing hands to work. They collect donations, prepare them for display, and keep track of inventory needs. The recordkeeping team gathers family information and tracks the number of children served. A small team of people purchase new items to supplement donations. Families from all over the community give the items that fill the Kids Connection shop.

Many groups and organizations have shared resources with Kids Connection in the past decade. Consignment sales donate unsold inventory. Children attending KidLife bring school supplies. DNow students collect donations. Dawson Life Groups stuff Christmas stockings. Others help fill school supply bags, sort donated consignment inventory, or give the shop a deep cleaning.



8,000+

client appointments as of April 2021

6,000+ different children served

(many served two or more times, some more than 10 x)

2,000 bags of school supplies distributed since 2014

1,650 Christmas stockings distributed since 2016

10,000+ pairs of new shoes given since 2015

85 foster families served (some served 3-4 x)

300+ foster children served



*"I needed
clothes and
you clothed
me"*

Matthew 25:36

Starting in 2015, a number of Kids Connection families began attending KidLife at Dawson. Volunteers provide breakfast, transport children from the shop to and from the church, and give them lunch before their families pick them up.

As Dawson increased its efforts to support foster families, Kids Connection began hosting "foster family days" in 2017, which were extra shopping opportunities for these special families. Many foster families now return to Kids Connection each time they are blessed with the chance to help another child.

Offsite storage held extra inventory for several years, but in 2018, Dawson acquired space next to Kids Connection, allowing all inventory to be moved to the shop. This made it easier for volunteers to restock shelves and swap out seasonal items. The addition also gave more room for spiritual support meeting areas and provided space for groups to work on special projects like filling Christmas stockings or school supply bags.

Like most things in 2020, activity at Kids Connection paused as the pandemic unfolded. In fall of 2020, clients shopped

one day a week, with care taken to keep shoppers and volunteers safe. As life moves back to a more familiar routine, Kids Connection continues to provide opportunities for clients and volunteers to interact safely at the shop.

Looking back, God has clearly worked through Kids Connection, allowing the ministry and its volunteers to serve thousands of children in the Birmingham area. The needs are still great, especially as families work through the challenges of the pandemic in addition to obstacles already in their lives.

Looking forward, Kids Connection runs on the energy and compassion of its volunteers. You can make a difference in the lives of children who live just a few miles from you, but who have needs that may be hard to imagine. If you have a few hours to spare, you are needed!

VOLUNTEER TODAY

To learn how you can be a part of Kids Connection, please email kidsconnectionAL@gmail.com, or contact Ben Hale at (205) 871-7321 or bhale@dawsonchurch.org.

VOLUNTEER TESTIMONIES

RETAIL

JEANNIE RICE

I was so blessed to be a Kids Connection volunteer since the doors opened. I never imagined the Lord would use my fashion merchandising degree and experience as a retail buyer in a ministry! It's such a blessing to help make the shopping experience for our clients welcoming and enjoyable. We want them to know we love them by providing beautiful merchandise in a well-organized shop and volunteers who are happy to help them shop for their children.

LAURA HUNTER

During one of my client's visits, cold weather was coming. When we came to the rack of coats, I said, "Each of your children will be able to go home with a new winter coat today, so let's pick one out for them!" She was overcome with emotion. She looked at the coats, then at me with tears in her eyes and said "I am overwhelmed. Thank you so much."

SPIRITUAL SUPPORT

BETTY SANDS

It is very humbling to visit with and pray with our clients. One lady in particular comes to mind—her son had committed suicide, her parents had died, and she was raising several grandchildren. As I prayed with her, I was moved by her faith and her thankfulness for Kids Connection. She asked for strength as she grieved the loss of family members and then for wisdom and strength in raising her grandchildren. What a humbling moment.

KARMIN LYTLE

It has been a blessing to be a part of what God is doing at Kids Connection. One encounter I recall is with a woman who lost almost all of her possessions in a fire. She and her children escaped, but the fire took their home. As she shared all that had happened, she said this was the first time she could let her guard down and tell someone her story. Kids Connection provided clothes and toys but also a safe place for her to talk and someone to pray with her. Like this woman, our clients are often walking through serious hardship.

MIKE HATHORNE

So many times, a mother, grandmother, or foster mother would come in and be burdened with responsibilities. As we would ask how we could pray for them, a smile would often appear. The mother's heavy heart had been uplifted for a few minutes by volunteers who showed her the love of Christ. A humble moment of experiencing God's love.

DONATION PROCESSING

DIANE ORSO

Our Monday team—we talk a lot! We're in different Life Groups but we laugh together, and pray for each other, Kids Connection, and our clients. We want the kids to be excited about the clothes they get. We want our clients to feel like they are shopping in a store. It's very satisfying to know we are serving people who need our help.

THOM MCINNIS

After I retired, I was looking for something to do that was purposeful and meaningful to others. Even though I don't see the families, it's rewarding to walk through the shop at the end of the day when it's replenished. I'm moved by the work and dedication of the donation processing volunteers

and how wonderful the shop looks. The transformation makes me proud of what the donation folks have done and what Kids Connection is accomplishing.

OTHER

ED PHILLIPS, DIRECTOR

One of our first clients was a single mother. For 5 to 6 years, she shopped regularly, often with her two boys. When the older son became an Eagle Scout, he asked if he could organize his "management project" at Kids Connection. Over several Saturdays, he and his group members sorted clothing and helped clients. I felt privileged to know this family and see the boys grow up. I'm thankful Kids Connection could help them during some difficult years.

DON STEEN

FORMER EXECUTIVE PASTOR

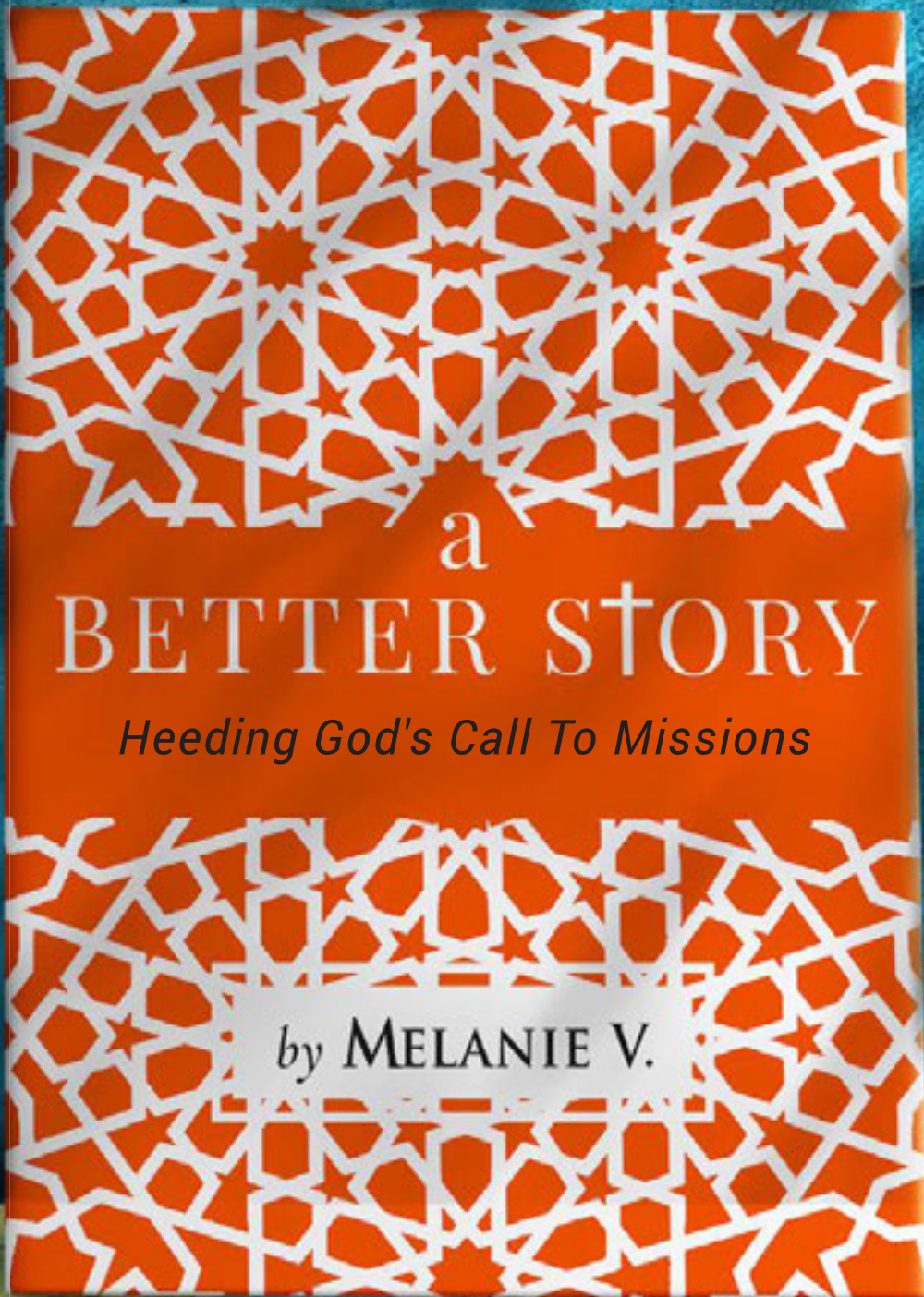
I am thankful I was a part of the preparation of the Kids Connection facility. During renovations, I was able to visualize and pray for how this ministry would meet the needs of children and families. I was excited that Dawson would not only meet the physical needs of people in the community, but also show the love of Christ.



Alice Elmore has been a member of Dawson for more than 20 years, along with her husband, Greg, who grew up attending Dawson, and their daughters, Molly and Charlotte. Alice teaches a 1st Grade Life Group.

A very special leadership team of two has been at the helm of **Kids Connection** since its start. Director **Ed Phillips** and his wife, Joy, have shepherded the ministry from an idea to the bright and welcoming shop it is today. "Kids Connection would not have been the success it is without them." *Ben Hale, Evangelism and Missions Pastor*





a
BETTER STORY

Heeding God's Call To Missions

by **MELANIE V.**



As a small-town girl from Alabama, my life was shaped by stories. I have loved reading books and stories of adventure for as long as I can remember. I'm sure this is why I grew up with a curiosity to learn about the world and other cultures.

I have found that God uses every piece of our story. He blessed me with the gift of knowing Him as Savior at an early age, and later he planted me in a church where GA's (Girls in Action) and the importance of missions was taught. I remember sitting in total amazement as I heard the stories about people who had moved to other countries just to tell others about Jesus. I couldn't believe that there were people all over the world who had never even heard of Him. Sometimes I would even imagine what it would be like to live in a different country and was often disappointed that I didn't.


A few years later, a conversation with a family member got me thinking about my life. As a teenager, I thought my life would unfold like any traditional story. I would go to college, find a job, get married, and have a family. But I felt inclined to pray about it. So, as a 16-year-old, I prayed for the first time about how God would use my life. If He wanted me to spend it serving Him on foreign soil, so be it. I was willing. From then on, God began to cultivate in me an excitement for serving Him and a genuine desire to see people reached with the Gospel.

Fast forward a few years to when I'm in college. I'm now the one who is on a mission trip located in a small village in Guatemala surrounded by mountains and leading someone in a prayer to receive Christ. I was also able to share Bible stories, albeit in imperfect French, to unreached North African immigrants in Paris. I loved the direction my life was going, and these experiences made me confident that this was the route for me. Yes, I have lacked some maturity, but I was sure that would come with time.

After I graduated college, I applied for the Journeyman program with the International Mission Board and served in Eastern Europe for two years. I worked in a coffee shop and taught some basic English classes in a post-Communist nation. Only a few people there actually read the Bible for themselves or had a clear understanding of what a saving relationship with Christ through grace was really like. Unfortunately, during those two years, I saw a core group of believers fall apart. However, I did have the privilege of discipling a lady (it was very much a team effort) and years later, a group came together that eventually formed into a church.

What I had expected to be a reasonably smooth two years in the Balkans turned out to be a time that stretched and bent me like a pretzel. Even so, I left with a deeper understanding of God's grace and, yet again, what I thought was a clear picture of where my life was heading. Seminary was the next logical step in pursuing full-time missions.

Once I came back to the USA, I thought I wanted to go to a seminary in another state, but God directed me to Beeson Divinity School, in Birmingham. Each step toward Beeson was an act of complete faith. I must have been looking at seminary as one more thing to check off on my list. I wanted to get the shortest degree I needed to pursue my future ambitions. Instead, I was encouraged to pursue a Masters of Divinity degree, which meant a longer, more rigorous program. Although it was challenging, my season at Beeson turned out to be very formative in many ways. I grew in my love and knowledge of God's Word.



I also realized that I had some skills and passions that I had not previously recognized, and I enjoyed using those skills and developing them further.

During my last year of seminary, I was planning to serve overseas in North Africa. When I say planning, I mean I had everything lined up. I knew exactly where I would be living and what I would be doing. After graduation, my plan was to spend a few months with my family before moving overseas. Suddenly, and without any warning, everything I had been diligently working towards completely unraveled, and all of my plans came crashing down around me.

It was a hard fall. There I was with a master's degree, but now I also had an even greater degree of uncertainty about what God was doing or what would come next. For a while, I questioned if I was even called to serve overseas and whether I would ever step foot on foreign soil again.


As I was feeling my way out of the fog, I eventually landed back in Birmingham. I was looking for a new church home, so I began visiting Dawson on Sunday mornings and joined shortly after. I was also drawn to the Arabic congregation that meets at Dawson and started visiting with them each week.

I stayed very connected with the Arabic congregation who became like family to me. I even had the privilege of leading the group on several trips to work with Arabic-speaking refugees in Clarkston, Georgia. I also had the opportunity to go to the Middle East one summer and serve refugees with members from Dawson's Arabic congregation.

It was an amazing summer, however, after not finding any clear open doors for going back overseas, I settled into a full-time job. I was enjoying my community of friends and the opportunities God had given me for serving Him locally, but that was about to change.

One day, I heard about a ministry in the Middle East that had a three-fold mission: to equip Arabic-speaking Christian women leaders, work to build up the society, and to serve refugees. I was intrigued and wanted to know more. After meeting with the leaders of this ministry, I visited them in the Middle East to see if God was leading me there. Each day was a true step of faith, yet everything seemed to be indicating that it was where God wanted me to be.

With that, I moved to the Middle East almost two and a half years ago, and after two years of studying their language, I launched into my full-time ministry. My role is a support role. I work in an office where I help assist the leaders of the ministry whose influence reaches to over a dozen countries throughout the Arab world. Our goal is to see lives changed by the Gospel and also to plant new churches. I am responsible for helping with the daily operations from the administrative side.



My gifts support the ministry leaders to give them time to do other tasks. I also work with others to help fund the projects we seek to implement to impact this nation (and others around us) for Jesus. In addition to my “day job,” I spend time studying Arabic and I work to develop intentional friendships with people in my community. Some of these opportunities occur naturally, like at a gym or helping someone who wants to practice their English. Even though I am an introvert, I love welcoming people into my home for a cup of tea or chatting with Arab women over a cup of coffee at local cafés.

The work here often seems slow. Outright evangelism is not allowed, and Christians can face some opposition. Even though Evangelicals number slightly more than a quarter of one percent of the population, we can still be a light in a dark world. God is definitely at work. He is still drawing people to Himself through dreams and visions.

Almost a year ago, I was introduced to a lady who grew up a Muslim. She has an amazing story of coming to faith after seeing a vision of a cross and then hearing Jesus speak to her in a dream. She and her family have become family to me. We meet regularly to talk about what we’re reading together in the Bible. She is so hungry to learn more about Jesus, and she wants to teach her children the ways of Christ and for them to know the Bible stories she didn’t know when growing up.

I am so grateful for the life I now lead in the Middle East. I could never have imagined the details that would lead me here—the heartache, the painful losses, and the complete turnarounds. This time, I am offering everything that I have to the Lord with my hands wide open. I no longer pitch my ideas to Him for how my life should look so that my story would look better. Instead, I look for myself in His greater story. One of my seminary professors once said,

“Everybody has a story, but only one story redeems our story.” Although the details I thought I wanted for my own story weren’t bad, they fell short. My story, every bit of it, has been redeemed by Christ, and I have the joy to live to tell about it to a lost and dying world.

I thank my Dawson Family of Faith for playing such a crucial role in my story and God’s work in the Middle East. As my sending church, you commissioned me over two and a half years ago to serve here. You have shown your commitment to being a mission-minded church through your prayerful and financial support. You are truly making a lasting impact on people who are in need of hearing the truth of the Gospel. And because of that, God’s story gets the greater glory.

Editor’s Note: For her safety, Melanie V.’s information has not been disclosed. To learn more about her ministry in the Middle East, please contact Ben Hale at bhale@dawsonchurch.org.

Congrats

seniors
class of
2021 !

DAWSON **LOVES** OUR SENIORS



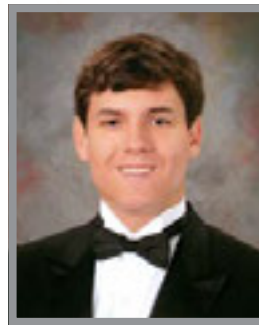
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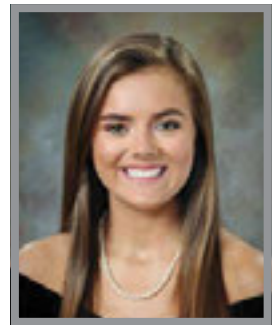
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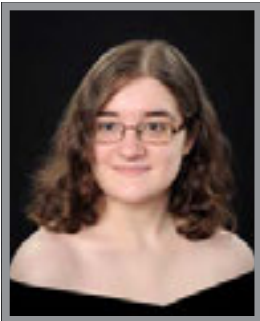
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Caleb Blanchard



Emma Kathryn Compere



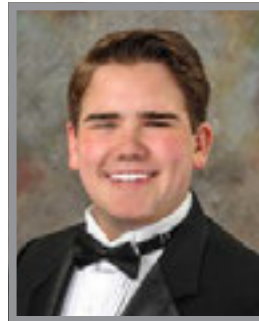
Hannah Crittenden



Sam Culbertson



Alyssa Elliott



J.T. Ellison



EmmaLee Floyd



John Christian Gaiser



John Heiberger



Jordan Holland



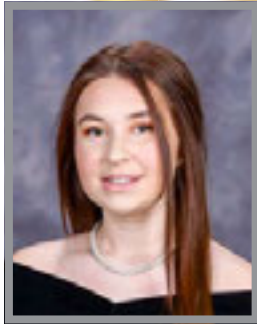
Andrew Hudson



Carson Hughes



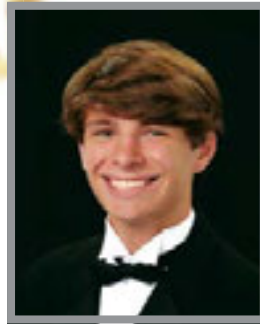
Olivia Hunter



Ali Hyde



Len Irvine



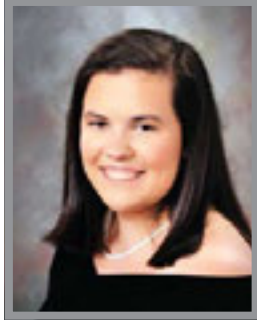
Grant Kaiser



Josh Kaiser



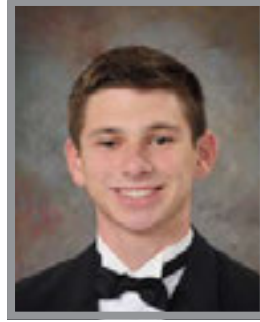
Alyssa Langford



Raines Langston



Nathan Mitchell



Marshall James Newsom



Ethan Owens



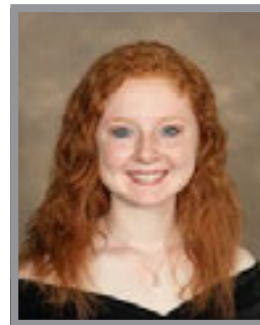
Brock Payne



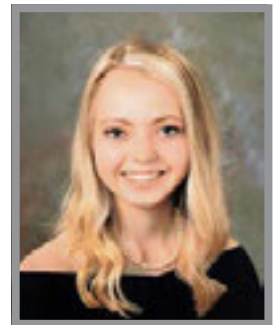
Mary Claire Powell



SaraGrace Prohitt



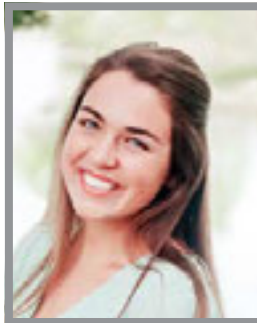
Elizabeth Simpson



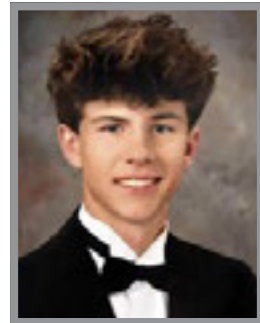
Summer K. Smith



Palmer Sparks



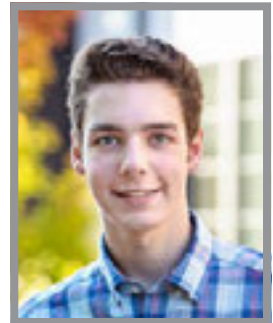
Abigail Stephenson



Will Sutton



Sydney Taylor



Ryan Walker



Julia Weingarten



Ellie Willcutt



Jackson Yanosky

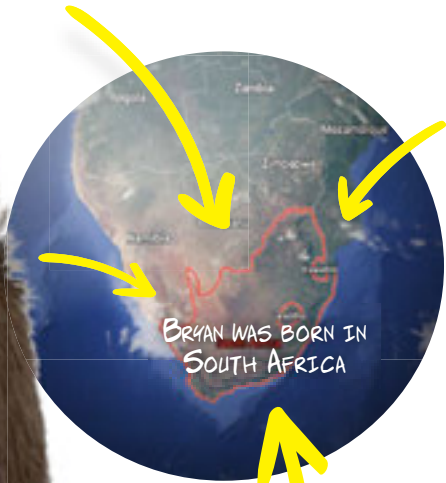
NOT PICTURED

Blake Bunshaw
Brinley Cassell
Annelise Clark
Brooklyn Collier
Jack Crouch
Emily Griffin
Alan Isenhower
John Mark James

Sam Jones
Emma Miller
Thomas Robinson
Christian Stein
Thomas Sullivan
Tyler Walley
Will Westerlund

DID YOU KNOW?

BRYAN IS A MULTITASKER. WHEN NOT MINISTERING AND, LIKE MOST PEOPLE, HE ENJOYS PROCESSING PAPERWORK (JUST KIDDING.)



BRYAN SHOOTS HOOPS WHENEVER HE HAS A CHANCE, AND IS NOT SO BAD AT THAT.



Changed forever

By Bryan Howard
Minister to Students

If you would have told me back in March of 2020 that the next 12 months would be one of the most enjoyable and refining seasons of my life, I would not have believed you. Who could have fathomed the year of COVID-19 would be the year that I got married, said farewell to Recreation Ministry, and said hello to **Student Ministry**. God has been so faithful to me and my family this year, not because of these new blessings in my life, but because He so clearly stood by my side and guided me every step of the way, just as He promised in Scripture. Looking back on this past year, I can't help but smile as I remember what God has done in the midst of all the chaos.

Growing up, I was blessed with an incredible, God-fearing family. My parents were both missionaries in various parts of Africa for seven years, which is where my sisters and I were born. I was born in Johannesburg,

South Africa, and within the same year, my family moved back to the States.

After coming off the mission field, both my parents went straight into full-time ministry within the local church. My Dad served as my Senior

"I had nothing left to reach out for besides Jesus."

Pastor growing up. You can imagine where this story is heading. Literally being born into ministry, being a missionary kid and a pastor's kid, it was a perfect storm for some rebellious years.

To be honest, growing up I had no longing to know or follow this Jesus character. I heard about Him every night at dinner, I survived listening to my Dad preach about Him every Sunday, and I simply was not impressed. God became so common to me, and I became so numb to Him. Life was pretty normal for me until tragedy struck our family. During the end of my middle school years and into my first year in high school, my family took a pretty hard hit financially. We ended up losing our house, and I just couldn't fathom how a loving God could allow something like this to happen to people who so faithfully served Him like my parents. I began to question a lot of things in life, especially God.

Long story short, I went through a season in my life where I tried anything and everything to find purpose and satisfaction in life, and I was only left more empty. There came a point where I had nothing left to reach out for besides Jesus, so in desperation I gave Him a chance. It wasn't an instantaneous life change, but it was a monumental moment for me. Over that next year, God so graciously used me to lead my peers and have the opportunity to lead a Bible study.

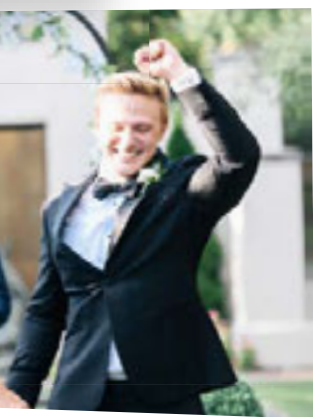
BRYAN MARRIED HIS HIGH SCHOOL SWEETHEART, KENDALL HIGDON, IN AUGUST 2020.





But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

1 Timothy 1:16-17



This Bible study took place during my sophomore year in high school, and I still get chills remembering how God used it to shape me. It was a group of about 30 guys who lived in the same apartment complex as me. They came every week to hear the nerdy kid talk about Jesus, and I so vividly remember the first time I prayed with one of the guys to accept Christ. That moment changed me forever. It was the first time I felt like my life mattered. That group of guys changed my life far more than I ever changed theirs. I will forever be in their debt for the lessons they taught me, and from that moment, I knew I was called to ministry.

I continued to lead this Bible study throughout the remainder of high school, although the people and locations changed. One very welcomed addition to our group my junior year was a girl named Kendall. She quickly became one of my favorite members, not just because she was beautiful on the inside and outside, but because every time she spoke, she made me want to be more like Jesus. During our senior year, she was assigned to lead this group with me, and I knew I was in trouble! Her passion for people and for the Lord was evident, and that year we began dating. We dated throughout college, where she studied Professional Flight Management at Auburn University. We were each other's first (and only) boyfriend and girlfriend, and seven years later she became my wife.

Fast forward to college, God brought me to Samford University to study Religion in the Pre-Ministerial Scholars program. This is also when I found Dawson and began interning with the Student Ministry

the summer of my freshman year. God continued to refine and shape me, and Dawson became the first place I learned to preach, teach, and disciple young men. Good thing, too, because the year I graduated, God called me to Dawson's Recreation Ministry, where I would serve the next three years. I've often referred to the Recreation Ministry as the ultimate pressure cooker for ministry. It was so challenging in the best way possible and taught me the invaluable lessons of relational discipleship and meeting people where they were.

Kendall and I were married in August 2020, and what a blessing she has been! Kendall is now an airline pilot for Endeavor Air. At the end of 2020, God gave me the opportunity to continue serving in Recreation Ministry and to also serve as the Interim Minister to Students. My heart quickly fell back in love with Dawson students, and on March 1, 2021, God called me to serve officially as the Minister to Students.

I could have never guessed the path the Lord had for me these past few years, but I am continually humbled and increasingly grateful for the call He has placed on my life. As I look into this next season, I am reminded of the words Paul speaks to Timothy. My life without Jesus was not pretty, but God powerfully shaped me in my suffering and used my past failures for His glory. My prayer for Dawson's Student Ministry is that God is glorified, and also that through me, the DSM team, the students, and our leaders, everything that we do brings honor and glory to the only King, Jesus Christ.



Bryan Howard was born a missionary kid in Johannesburg, South Africa, and grew up in Orlando, Florida. He holds a B.A. in Religion from Samford University and is currently working on his Master of Divinity from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.



Dawson Music Academy Doesn't Miss A Beat!

By Kimberly Jones

Dawson Music Academy Director



OVER THE PAST YEAR, INSTRUCTORS, STUDENTS, AND FAMILIES OF DAWSON MUSIC ACADEMY EXPERIENCED A NEW APPLICATION FOR THE PHRASE **“DON'T MISS A BEAT.”**

As musicians, this phrase typically reminds us not to play too fast or too slowly. It also reminds us not to skip over any notes in the music. But in the past 12 months, we've learned a new meaning. We've learned to adjust how we do things because the “normal” way of doing things was no longer an option. We've learned how to use Zoom as a platform for connecting with students for online lessons and recitals. We've learned how to teach in-person lessons while wearing masks and practicing social distancing. Yet in the midst of all the adjustments, the priority of what we do and why we do it stayed the same. We enjoy teaching music, investing in students, and sharing the love of Christ.

Ministry of Relationships

There's something really special about the connection between a student and their music instructor. We value the

unique opportunities that God provides in weekly lessons for instructors not only to share musical insights, but also to encourage students in their day-to-day lives. When in-person lesson connections were limited earlier this year, we quickly shifted to online lesson formats so that students could continue to connect with their instructors. In a world where everything changed quickly and there were so many unknowns, one parent shared that her child eagerly looked forward to her online “lesson day” each week.

Online Musical Connections

In addition to teaching online lessons last spring, Dawson Music Academy adapted several of our annual musical celebrations to an online format. For Spring Recital Day 2020, we hosted 27 online Zoom recitals so that our more than 250 students could celebrate their musical progress.



One of our favorite highlights every year is DMA Summer Music Camp. For Summer Music Camp 2020, instead of connecting in-person at Dawson's campus, campers enjoyed a week's worth of musical fun at their own pace from their own home. From Meet the Instrument Sessions to Worship Rally songs to constructing musical instruments to creating craft projects, each day was filled with new and exciting musical adventures during our first ever online music camp.

In-Person Lesson Adjustments

Once in-person music lessons resumed on campus for fall semester, we enthusiastically welcomed over 275 students to lessons each week. Although lessons looked different as we wore masks and practiced social distancing, students and instructors gratefully celebrated the opportunity to connect in person and make music together again. Teacher-student duets once again became a favorite part of weekly in-person lessons. That was a welcomed adjustment, because during the online lesson season, duets were paused due to the "Zoom-lag" of two second sound delays. (Two seconds might not make a big difference in conversation lag-time, but it's a big distraction during a musical duet where it's important not to "miss a beat.")

Sharing the Joy of Music

We believe that music is a gift that is best when it's shared with others. Our commitment to this priority required some creative adjustments to several of our annual student celebrations in the midst of the season of social-distancing and mask-wearing.

For our annual Christmas community outreach, over 80 students shared Christmas music at Brookwood Mall. With sounds of the season shared by vocalists, pianists, guitarists, and violinists, DMA students celebrated the joy of music while wearing masks and practicing social distancing. As soon as students began to play, smiles filled the faces of parents, grandparents, and bystanders. Perhaps more than in previous years, parents and students expressed their gratitude for the joyful ways that music had encouraged their hearts during the Christmas season.

During our annual DMA Celebration Sunday in March of this year, nearly 100 students joined with the Dawson Sanctuary Orchestra to lead in Sunday Worship. Dawson Orchestra members, a piano ensemble, and DMA students joined together to celebrate the gift of music. Adapting to current CDC guidelines and recommendations, we spread student participation among all three Worship Services.

In April, families, friends, and instructors joined with students to celebrate their musical progress from the year with our annual Spring Recital Day. In addition to celebrating the student's talents, Spring Recital Day provided an opportunity for DMA families to meet our Dawson team and hear about ways to plug in to various ministries at Dawson. These connection points with our students and their families allow us to continue to minister to each of them in a personal way as we share the love of Jesus .

God's Continued Faithfulness

As we explored new ways to connect with students this year, God opened several new ministry opportunities for Dawson Music Academy. Throughout various changes and adjustments, our priorities remained steadfast, as does our God who sustains us as we go. Because God's mercies are new every morning and because of His constant faithfulness, Dawson Music Academy didn't miss a beat this past year.

We eagerly look forward to the coming years and all that God has in store for the future! God is changing lives through Dawson Music Academy. Thank you for your prayers and support as we continue to nurture a passion for music that will enrich the worship of Christ for many years to come.

If you are interested in learning more about supporting or connecting with the ministry of Dawson Music Academy, please email Kimberly Jones at kjones@dawsonchurch.org.



Kimberly Jones serves as the Director of Dawson Music Academy. She is passionate about helping students of all ages and backgrounds experience the joy of music and use their gifts to worship God. In her free time, she loves spending time with her husband Greg and son Garrett.



DISCOVERING DISCIPLESHIP

BY JEFF GUNNELLS

As the son of a Baptist preacher, I have been in church since I was three weeks old. My mother says she would rock my bassinet with one foot while playing the piano for worship services. My participation was not only encouraged, but guaranteed and non-negotiable: Sunday mornings and Sunday evenings, Wednesday nights, Vacation Bible School, Training Union, R. A.'s, youth camps, choir tours, mission trips, and Sword Drill. You name it, I was there. Preachers' kids have to buy into the whole church deal or else they run in a very different direction. I was blessed by a father who lived out his best sermons and was very genuine about his own faith. It was very easy for me to understand a personal relationship with my heavenly Father with the example lived out by my earthly father.

I participated on a mission trip to the Dominican Republic as a senior in high school and was part of an ensemble. We worked during the day with three doctors and two dentists, and then we sang concerts each evening. It was on that trip that I sensed God's call into medicine, and that set me on a course to enter Baylor University and then on to medical school at UAB in 1980.

My OB/GYN residency took us to Mobile for four years, where we were blessed to welcome our two sons, Drew and Taylor, into our family. We joined the church where my father was pastor. I had the privilege to be ordained as a deacon at that church, and my wife, Melissa, was very active in the young women's group. We moved back to Birmingham in 1988, and for the first time, we visited churches as a couple. We felt very comfortable at Dawson,

Melissa, particularly felt very welcomed by the Baptist Young Women, called BYW back then. We started teaching a Sunday School class very early with young adults our age. Twenty-seven years ago in the old Fellowship Hall, we started teaching a class for newlywed and newlywed couples. As time went on, we moved from the old Fellowship Hall to Homewood Middle School and then to the FRC using both the ballet room and aerobics room. Currently, we are back downstairs in the Fellowship Hall and continue to teach with a team of three other couples.

Melissa and I have always had a heart for marriage ministry, and in 2010, we started hosting Marriage Retreats at our farm in Marengo County. Almost two years ago, Jim and Dorinda Gifford attended a retreat, and Jim and I had some time together early one morning. He had his Bible and journal, and as we talked and shared, little did I know that my next chapter of ministry involving discipleship and a men's small group was about to begin.

I mentioned some of my early church experience earlier to help show that I had the right pedigree, exposure to excellent preaching, and involvement in some very special ministries. Over the years, I had been on multiple medical mission trips, chaperoned many Chapel Choir tours, and had participated in many ministry opportunities through Dawson. But that weekend I became aware that what I was missing in my own spiritual life was spending time daily in a disciplined Bible study. I had a short daily devotional time but not a time of consistent Bible study. Looking back on the 27 years of teaching



THESE
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the **Together For Life** class, I knew that we always used a core curriculum that was very biblically-based, but I had not been challenged about my own daily Bible study.

Jim shared with me a method that he and Pastor David had been using and how beneficial it had been for him personally. I figured if two of our seminary-trained ministers were both fired up about this approach, it was worth me checking out. Jim directed me to a book explaining the details and the principles about a small group. After some discussion and prayer, I reached out to three men. They had ideas of a few more men, and we put together a group of six. I was intimidated to start a group and facilitate something I had never experienced myself, but Jim offered to meet with our group initially to answer questions and be available to consult if we had any challenges.

The basics involve the **H.E.A.R.** method of reading the Bible together. First, you **Highlight** a verse, next you **Explain** it, then you **Apply** it, and lastly you decide what your **Response** will be to the Scripture you have highlighted. This is done in a journal form, reading a chapter or so each day and choosing two or three verses to journal on weekly. This plan also includes memorizing two verses of Scripture each week.

For me, the journaling was a discipline I had not consistently used in the past, but with repetition it became a more comfortable exercise for me. I discovered that having to express myself in written form was a step of accountability and really cemented for me what I was reading. As a group, it was always helpful to see which verse spoke to each person and learn from their insights. With the discipline of journaling, we took the opportunity to record our prayer needs, answers, and God's provisions in the lives of each group member.

The remarkable thing about the daily reading of Scripture is that I found myself in circumstances where what I read applied directly to a need that arose. When I stayed in God's Word consistently, God provided the exact message that I needed for any challenge I was having that day. Others in the group had highlighted things that perhaps I had not seen in certain Scriptures, and invariably each week someone had real life application of the insights gained. We found ourselves with scriptural guidance to our everyday problems and challenges.

The Bible is packed full of concrete advice and wisdom, and the only way to take advantage of it is to open it up and to try and apply what it is teaching. At age 63, I realized how much I had missed by not scheduling a consistent daily study in God's Word.

In addition to the scriptural insight, I also began to see the value of having a group of guys who I could communicate with each week. These men all had a desire to put

God first in their lives, and we often urged each other to persevere. Our group was a safe place to share our struggles and lean on each other for support. Our group is also diverse in ages, with the younger men bringing a fresh set of eyes and perspectives and the older ones sharing some wisdom gained with experience. The diversity was not intentional, but one that enriched our experiences.

Men tend to not ask advice from anyone, unless we think someone has particular expertise about our problem. Most of us have trouble admitting our weaknesses and challenges and are unwilling to become vulnerable with strangers or casual relationships. Being open and honest developed a deep level of trust in our group and provided a safe place to be transparent with one another.

In this model for small groups, after a year together, each member would then facilitate a new group of men. This is not a rapid growth model but rather a more organic process that feeds itself as the participants recognize its value and call on other men to participate. I have discovered that reading and studying God's Word daily and meeting with a small, trusted group of men weekly has not only held me accountable to this discipline but also helped me become a better husband, father, and servant leader for my family.

At my stage in life, I cannot regain the years lost without the consistent discipline of weekly Bible study and Scripture memorization, but I have made this a priority and have committed to do this going forward. If you would like to do the same, please contact me or Jim Gifford to help you get connected with a discipleship small group of your own.



Jeff Gunnells is an active deacon, and he and his wife, Melissa have been involved in all aspects of Dawson's Marriage Ministry since joining Dawson in 1988. They have now taught the Together For Life class for 27 years. As parents of two sons who were raised at Dawson, they take special pleasure in seeing their four grandchildren involved in Dawson's Preschool Ministry.



Mindful moments over tea

Unexpected Lessons of Savoring God's Good Gifts

By Lorna Reeves

For hundreds of years and for many cultures, teatime has been a time for mindful moments alone and for fellowshiping in community. Tea existed as a beverage for centuries before the practice of having afternoon tea came to be in England during the time of Queen Victoria. As the story goes, the Duchess of Bedford became hungry one afternoon and requested that hot tea and a few finger foods be brought to her chambers. She enjoyed the snack so much that she made it a regular ritual and began inviting friends to join her. Word then spread about this marvelous mid-afternoon pick-me-up, and teatime's popularity soared, especially once Queen Victoria embraced the trend. Afternoon tea became an elegant practice that brought people together around the nicely set table to enjoy dainty food and many pots of hot tea, giving guests time to share and listen, laugh, and maybe even cry together. Whether enjoyed in the company of several people, just with one other person, or in solitude, teatime can be a time God can use for His good purposes to feed our souls.

As 2020 began, I had resolved to slow down and to be more intentional myself about keeping up with friends

and family, even planning to host a few afternoon teas. And then as authorities worldwide began cautioning all of us to stay at home and to avoid gathering in groups in order to limit the spread of the unwelcome coronavirus, I found myself being more reflective and mindful as I sipped tea at home alone. I began to take time to taste tea instead of just drinking it and to savor food rather than just eating it, especially as friends who contracted COVID-19 told me that one of the strangest symptoms they experienced was the loss of taste and that they wouldn't take that sense for granted going forward.

Over the years, I had been guilty of quickly eating a meal so I could move on to the next thing on my to-do list, not really stopping to savor the food, even though there was nothing wrong with my own sense of taste. I am also quite guilty of doing that with tea—drinking it like it's my job, which it basically is, since I'm the editor of *TeaTime* magazine—but not fully appreciating its taste. I have access to many of the best teas on the market, but at times, I find myself taking them almost for granted, drinking them out of habit, or because I enjoy the hot liquid or the feel of the china teacup, or the heft of the mug in my hand.

I often think to myself after I've downed a pot or a mugful of tea, "What did that even taste like?"

In the 10-plus years I have been in the tea industry, I have attended many trade shows and tea festivals, where I have tasted a lot of teas. I have taken classes to learn about the different types of tea—white, green, yellow, oolong, black, and dark. Although they all come from the *Camellia sinensis* bush, it's the processing that dictates what type of tea will result. Things like the altitude at which the plant grows, the minerals in the soil, other plants growing nearby, the weather, and other factors influence the taste of the resulting tea. I learned by tasting teas, rather than just drinking them, to detect and appreciate the flavor profiles of ones from different regions. When you taste teas, you must be mindful of what you're doing. It is important to keep the sip of tea in your mouth long enough for the liquid to come in contact with all surfaces before swallowing, paying attention to the flavors, and then even after swallowing, to notice the lingering taste of the tea (called the "finish" in tea jargon). Some teas—fine oolongs in particular—are intended to be steeped multiple times, as they often yield different flavors with

Steeping Guide

White Teas

Water: 185 to 190 degrees
Steep Time: 1 to 3 minutes

Green Teas

Water: 160 to 185 degrees
Steep Time: 2 to 3 minutes

Oolong Teas

Water: 190 to 200 degrees
Steep Time: 1 to 2 minutes
per infusion

Black Teas

Water: 212 degrees
Steep Time: 3 to 5 minutes

Dark Teas

Water: 200 to 212 degrees
Steep Time: 2 to 4 minutes



Mindful Moments: Together Over Tea



Sunday, July 25, 4:00 p.m.

Please join us for a sweet time of fellowship around gorgeous tablescapes as Dawson women host an afternoon tea. Lorna Reeves, editor of *TeaTime* magazine, will lead in a teatime experience that will feed the soul. Learn more and register at dawsonchurch.org/women.

subsequent infusions. But only a mindful taster will pick up on those lovely nuances. Someone who is just interested in drinking tea or who is in a hurry might very well miss out on the beauty of the new taste notes of the unfurling tea leaves.

A few years ago, *TeaTime* published an article by Bruce Richardson about tea and health, and the last few sentences resonated with me then and really came back to the forefront of my mind over the last 18 months:

"Make teatime a part of your daily ritual. The act of making tea quiets a busy mind as the kettle makes us wait for the water to boil, the tea in the pot makes us wait for the full steep, and the tea in the cup makes us wait for the liquid to cool. It's during these short periods of waiting that our hearts beat more slowly, and our minds become calmer."

I have found that as a Christ follower, I can use that time of preparing the tea and eventually drinking it to tune my mind to the things of the Lord. However, my bent is to wish for the water to hurry up and get to the correct water temperature for the tea I'm going to steep—not all teas take boiling water, by the way—and to want the 2 to 5 minutes of infusing the leaves to elapse quickly and then to become impatient for the tea to cool so I can drink it. Do you sense a pattern here? I found myself missing out on the preparation needed for really being able to taste tea fully and properly. But when I took the time to relax and embrace the preparation process, I suddenly found myself appreciating the aroma of the tea that was too hot to drink and then the subtle flavors as the tea gradually cooled. It was during those times of waiting that I could contemplate the beauty of the natural world around me as I gazed out a window and marveled

at God's creativity. At other times, my mind pondered a passage from the Bible I had read earlier in the day that the Lord brought to mind, or I tuned to the words of a hymn my husband, Brent, was playing on the piano in the other room, as he prepared for his role in Dawson's Sunday services. Quite often, I would utter a prayer for a loved one or would give thanks for God's love, protection, or provision. Those became mindful moments of quiet contemplation, tasting tea, yes, but more importantly, tasting and seeing that the Lord is good.

I recently interviewed Anita Kannelis, a wedding planner here in Birmingham, who also has a small online tea business called Tea & Time, for an article for *TeaTime*'s May/June 2021 issue. She talked about how, though she was a Christian, she fell into a deep depression after her father died suddenly. During that time, she was reading a book in which the author advocated having something soothing like tea in a quiet space.

So, Anita started having hot apple cider and, eventually, switched from drinking apple cider to tea. She told me she absolutely loved that time by herself and even started making

scones and lemon bars to enjoy during her teatime. "That's what brought me out of depression," she explained, "It wasn't the tea itself; it was the process of meditation and prayer while having tea."

Whether our teatimes are personal mindful moments of sipping tea in communion with God alone or whether we make them a time of intentional fellowship with or ministry to others, they can invite us to slow down and linger in God's presence so He can accomplish His purposes in us and through us as we commit ourselves to honor Him. It is then that we can truly taste and see that He is indeed good.

*"Oh, taste
and see
that the
LORD is
good..."*

Psalm 34:8



Lorna Reeves is editor of *TeaTime*, a publication of Hoffman Media, where she has worked for 30 years. She and her husband, Brent Reeves, who is Dawson's organist/pianist, have an adult daughter and an adult son and will soon be adding a daughter-in-law to the family. Lorna sings in the Sanctuary Choir and co-teaches a women's Life Group.

SUMMER

schedule

CHURCH-WIDE EVENTS

June 13 & 14 Retreat Day at Camp Dawson
June 16 MidWeek Bible Study: Jeremiah & Lunch Begins
June 27 Chapel Choir Mission Tour Home Concert
August 15 Kickoff Sunday

PRESCHOOL

June 7-11 KidLife Week (age 4 by September 1, 2021 through K)*
June 19-22 Preschool Music Camp
(Age 4 by September 1, 2021 through K)*
June 21-24 Dawson Day School Summer Camp
(Age 18 months through 4K)*

KIDS

June 7-11 KidLife Week (Grades 1-5)*
June 14-17 Basketball Camp 1 (Grades 1-5)*
June 14-18 Ballet Camp (Age 4-Grade 2)*
June 21-25 CentriKid Day Camp (Grades 1-5)*
July 6-9 BIG Art Camp (Grades 1-5)*
July 12-15 Basketball Camp 2 (Grades 1-5)*
July 19-23 Kids Music Camp (Grades K-5)*
July 26-30 CentriKid Overnight Camp (Grades 3-5)*
July 26-29 Hispanic VBS (in Neighborhoods)
August 13 Mission smash (Rising 5th Graders)

STUDENTS

June 16 High School Summer Nights Kickoff
June 18-27 Chapel Choir Mission Tour
June 23 Middle School Summer Nights Kickoff
June 30 DSM Summer Nights (HS & MS)
July 7-11 Breakaway
July 21 & 28 DSM Summer Nights (HS & MS)

WOMEN'S EVENTS

June 15 Women's "Altar'd" Bible Study Begins
June 16 Women's "Saints and Scoundrels" Bible Study Begins
June 22 Summertime TABLE Gathering
July 25 Mindful Moments: Together Over Tea Event

MISSIONS

June 14-18 Summit Community Church VBS (Maine)

*All grades denoted are the school grades completed by this summer.



TEN MINUTE TALK

A Series of
Rapid-Fire
Questions
With Dawson
Staff Members

In October of 2020, Donna Allan celebrated 20 years as Dawson's Associate Minister to Preschoolers. Donna's love for children and her desire to point them to Jesus is evident in her words and actions. She's also the ultimate team player, modeled by her willingness to dress up as a Spartan Cheerleader for a staff party or deliver a stellar performance in the latest KidLife video! It's easy to see why Donna brings so much joy to all those who are around her. Learn more fun facts about her below.

What's your favorite summer activity?

Laying at the beach or by the pool.

Who do you admire most?

My daddy.

What's your dream vacation spot?

I love to go to the beach.

What's your hometown?

Tuscaloosa.

Morning person or night owl?

Night!

Name one of your hobbies.

Reading.

What's the strangest thing you have ever eaten?

I don't eat weird things. I love food, but if something's weird and I don't know what it is, I'm not going to eat it.

Favorite movie of all time?

Chapter Two. It's old, with Marsha Mason.

Where would you go if you were invisible?

I would probably watch my adult children, what they're doing during the day, because I miss knowing that.

First concert?

Elton John. When I was in high school in Tuscaloosa. He threw a piano bench and broke it.

What was your first job?

Wrapping Christmas presents for a men's clothing store.

Go-to karaoke song?

Oh my! I've never done karaoke before.

Something you've always wanted to do?

Be a rock star and wear leather pants and high heel shoes.

Do you enjoy roller coasters?

No.

What's the oldest thing you own?

My grandmother's metal andirons with her initials on the front.

Favorite musician?

Let's go with Lauren Daigle. Of course The Eagles come up pretty high on the list too, so I don't know.

Ever broken a bone?

No.

Ocean or mountains?

Ocean.

What 2 things would you want if you were stranded on a desert island?

My pillow and a book.

How do you like your steak cooked?

Almost crunchy.

Board games or puzzles?

Board games.

Are you competitive?

Yes. Playing a board game, I'll cheat to win. At exercise and stuff, I don't want the person next to me to go faster on the bike. It's a silent competition.

What's your favorite beverage?

Sweet tea, all day long.

What's your middle name?

Ruth.

Do you have a nickname?

No.

Can you play an instrument?

I can play the piano, and I could play the French horn. when I was younger.

Who would you want to play you in a movie about your life?

I love Diane Keaton.

Who's the last person you texted?

My husband.

First celebrity crush?

Oh, Bobby Sherman.

What was the last photo you took?

It was of my son's dog. Because we kept him a few days ago and I sent pictures to him.

Chocolate or vanilla?

Chocolate.

Do you have a secret talent?

I don't think so.

What's your favorite animal?

I guess a dog. Strangely, I have cats.

Is a hot dog a sandwich?

No.

What are you most proud of?

My children.

What show have you recently binge watched?

Call the Midwife. It is the best show! It just came out with a new season, and I'm saving it. I can't decide when I'm going to watch it!

Favorite fashion accessory to wear?

Bracelets.

Can you speak a language other than English?

Nope.

What would your dj name be?

Things like that, I've got nothing!

Sushi or tacos?

Tacos! Ugh, I don't even eat seafood!

Pineapple on pizza: yes or no?

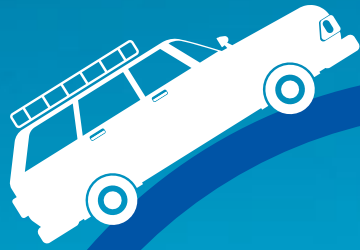
Yes. In fact, always.

What's your favorite exercise?

Barre.

Best part of your job?

The relationships with the families and children.



June 7-11, 2021

**Register or volunteer at
dawsonchurch.org/KidLife.**



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An underwater scene with a bright sun at the top, bubbles, and various sea creatures including a yellow octopus, a green pufferfish, a red crab, a pink jellyfish, and several colorful fish. The background is a gradient of blue.

Summer Music Camp

July 19–23

REGISTER AT
dawsonmusicacademy.org.