[Nockels:] As I walk onto a stage my heart is in prayer for those people to understand it. Because I believe God uses music that powerfully that it can bypass whatever we’ve gone through that day, whatever circumstance we’re in. It can bypass the intellect and it can go straight to our soul somehow. He’s the creator of it and He uses it powerfully like that by His spirit.

[Easley:] Well, today we have the great privilege of having Christie Nockels with us on *inContext*. Christie, you’re down in Nashville, Tennessee?

[Nockels:] Yes.

[Easley:] You and Nathan have been married . . .?

[Nockels:] It'll be thirteen this summer, in June.

[Easley:] How did you guys meet?

[Nockels:] We were acquaintances at Oklahoma Baptist University, kind of had a lot of mutual friends, but we really didn't kind of get together until we were out at the Christian Artist Seminar in Estes Park, Colorado -

[Easley:] Mmm hmm.

[Nockels:] - and that was in the summer of '93.

[Easley:] Mmm hmm.

[Nockels:] And then we married in the summer of '95.

[Easley:] Christie Nockels is a synonym with Passion, with Watermark, and her extraordinary giftedness coming out in many ways in her music.

Christie, talk to us a little bit how you came to Christ. You grew up as a PK, I understand.

[Nockels:] I did. Really, it’s been cool. Just the last year I’ve used my testimony a lot because the Scripture, I really came to know Christ through a Scripture. And it was from these 1970s like wall plaques that my mom had on our wall in the hallway of our house. And I don’t know if you remember them, but it says you’re name and then it says the meaning of your name.

[Easley:] Right.

[Nockels:] And it has like a Scripture under it.

[Easley:] Right.

[Nockels:] And so, as a seven year old I was learning to handwrite and it was the very first thing that I kind of memorized -
[Easley:] Huh.

[Nockels:] And then I learned to write it and it’s Psalm 37:5. I think that version said, “Commit your way unto the Lord, trust also in Him and He shall bring it to pass.”

[Easley:] Wow.

[Nockels:] And I learned to write that and I remember sitting in church and I would kind of doodle, you know, while my dad was preaching.

[Easley:] Uh huh.

[Nockels:] And I handed the note to my mom and she had the wisdom to take it and turn it over and she wrote back and kind of paraphrased that Scripture to me. And it said, “Yes, if Christie gives her heart to Jesus, He will show her the way to go.”

[Easley:] Huh.

[Nockels:] And the Lord just used that moment and that’s just when it clicked for me and the Spirit just, I remember it -

[Easley:] Wow.

[Nockels:] - that He convicted me for the first time of my sin and that I needed a Savior and I remember walking up to my dad that night and I was baptized, I think, a week later. And then that verse just, and maybe I’ll tell you a little bit later, but just how that verse has come back around in my life so many times. It’s kind of been my life verse, so that’s how I came to know Jesus.

[Easley:] Christie, has your life always been music? I mean, has it been part of your experience?

[Nockels:] It really has. I think growing up in the church, I had that platform really early on. And my parents just, they had so much wisdom in that area. I think they were really good to give me the opportunity to sing. I think I started singing solos in church when I was seven or eight years old.

[Easley:] Uh-huh.

[Nockels:] And I remember singing an Evie song called “GiveThem All to Jesus.”

[Easley:] Right..

[Nockels:] So very, very early I started singing and it really wasn’t until high school that I kind of started writing and letting other people hear, you know, what I was writing.

But I would say I have some poetry as early as, you know, eight or nine years old about God and creation and so I think it all really started back then.

[Easley:] Wow. Wow. Now, were you in piano lessons, guitar lessons, voice lessons,
all that kind of stuff?

[Nockels:] Well, my mom, she still actually is a piano teacher to this day. She has a studio of her own with about forty students.

[Easley:] Wow.

[Nockels:] And she taught my whole life. I mean I grew up hearing every classical, you know, piece you could imagine while I’m trying to watch, you know, whatever cartoon in the next room. [laughter] And she would always try to get me to sit down and take lessons and I would usually learn it by ear. I would learn the piece by ear and she would say, “That’s great, but can you do it in the key it was written in?” You know. [laughter] And so I kind of just had this, almost a handicap, because I heard music by ear so much that it really kept me from really understanding theory and getting it.

[Easley:] Right.

[Nockels:] And so I think my mom was pretty frustrated. But now, she obviously sees that, you know, it all worked out okay.

[Easley:] Yeah. Interesting.

[Nockels:] So, I can play enough to write with but that’s -

[Easley:] The axiom is, of course, you can’t teach your kids an instrument, right? I means that’s just -


[Easley:] There you go, there you go. Well, you bring Nathan up. Let’s talk about Nathan.

[Nockels:] Sure.

[Easley:] You met at Oklahoma Baptist College. Tell us about that experience. How you guys started dating and eventually got married.

[Nockels:] Well, he had a mutual friend that I had met in high school named Charlie Hall who is now a worship leader with the Passion movement.

[Easley:] Right.

[Nockels:] And they kind of, at the time that we met, had a ministry together called “Nathan and Charlie.” And we laugh because it was such an original name, you know. “Nathan and Charlie.” [laughter]

But they actually had a pretty neat ministry kind of in a tri-state area. They were already recording CDs and leading worship at, you know, Disciple Now events and youth retreats and things like that. And so when I met Nathan it just seemed real natural for me to kind of go with them on some of those and kind of sing, you know, parts with them and I learned so much about leading worship from them. And it really was when I met
Nathan that I really started writing, kind of. I mean, there were a lot of songs that were on our first Watermark record that we wrote even when we were dating.

[Easley:] Hmm.

[Nockels:] And that was the first time that, I remember telling my parents, “He can hear the songs that are in my head. He can hear the melodies that I have always dreamed of them coming into fruition and he hears them and he can play them.”

And my parents knew it was a really special thing when we met and they could see that, really, it seemed God had saved much of my gifting to happen when I met him.

[Easley:] Uh huh.

[Nockels:] And it just really was a sweet marriage. Not only just with our relationship, but musically too. And it just, really his strengths are my weaknesses as far as musically. And kind of the same way, I mean, he’d tell you that he couldn’t write a lyric to save his life. It’s interesting, I mean, just how that all really came together. It was really very exciting to meet someone like that and to watch that all come together, I guess, for us.

[Easley:] We were talking to Sara Groves the other day and she said she often gets asked, “How does one become Sara Groves?”

She said, “You marry Troy Groves.” [laughter]

[Nockels:] Exactly.

[Easley:] And it was very similar. She said, “Troy’s got everything figured out. I write music and sit at a piano.”

And so it was pretty funny how God puts folks together.

[Nockels:] Yeah.

[Easley:] Now, you and Nathan have three kids. Tell us about your kiddos.

[Nockels:] Well, we have a seven year old, Noah, and he is in first grade this year. And then we have a five year old, Eliana and she is in pre-Kindergarten.

[Easley:] Mmm hmm.

[Nockels:] And then we have a nine month old -

[Easley:] Wow. Wow.

[Nockels:] Annie Rose. Who is up in her bed right now taking a nap like a good girl so I can do this interview. [laughter]

[Easley:] Good, good! We’ll try to keep it that way. Now, let’s talk a little bit about Point of Grace and Passion and Watermark. Obviously, huge event for you and Nathan
to shut down, if that’s a fair comment, Watermark. What was that like?

[Nockels:] Well, it was a really special night for us. I mean, I think just the journey of Watermark for us, it felt like it needed some sort of special ending time like that with the people who had walked that journey with us. And so, you know, the label asked, let’s do a compilation record and we said, “Well, we’d like to do that, but could we do it live? And could we invite in artists like Point of Grace and Shane & Shane and Chris Tomlin and Charlie Hall to come in and really just kind of help us not only close that chapter of our lives, but also just kind of sort of breathe into where we’re going and where we felt that we were headed with leading worship and just being a family. And it just felt like it was a great ending but also a great beginning, if that makes sense, to the next chapter.

[Easley:] Was is sad?

[Nockels:] Yeah it was. I mean, I remember leaving almost feeling like the day that we got in the limo to leave our wedding, you know? We were so excited, but also, it’s a new beginning, but it’s also you’re ending your singleness. And, you know, so it was kind of that feeling. And all these people came to honor that time and it felt, we were so exhausted when we left that night, I remember. And it felt like, this feels like when we got married and we left our wedding and we were just like, “Ahhh.”

But, it was a really sweet time and I’m so glad that we have it on tape, you know.

[Easley:] Beyond ending Watermark, there was some motivation for you to go home. Talk a little bit about that.

[Nockels:] Yes. I mean, I think that for years we had children inside of this journey and because of that it began to change everything. And I think with our label, you know, it’s not fair to them to sign on the dotted line and then say no to everything. You know, so I think that for so long, you know, we needed to respect them and to respect the contract that we were under and do the things that they asked us to do within reason. But I think we just knew as the time was ending and it was time to resign a record deal, we just said, “You know what? We’ve got to just kind of wipe everything off the table and go home and just rest.”

And I really, I just needed that and my children needed that and we have done that for the past three years. It will be three years this spring and it has just been one of the greatest decisions that we’ve ever made. And God has taught me so much as far as just, the sacred calling of being a mom, and I think that just by His grace we definitely made it through the time of Watermark.

And I don’t feel that we ever strayed outside of His will, but I do know that He prepared our hearts for that ending of that journey so that when I did get home He could really lay some things on my heart and teach me some pretty profound things from my life and just in my little world and from my kids. And it’s just been amazing and I think the one thing that I’ve really come to know is that God is asking me to just focus on what He’s put in front of me. And right now, that’s my husband and, obviously my relationship with the Lord, but my husband and my relationship with my children.

And it’s been the coolest thing because, these past three years, the more that I’ve
focused on that and just said, “Okay Lord, I’m going to be faithful to what you’ve put in front of me;” it’s like, the more He allows me to do things that I never thought I would be able to do.

And it’s like you hit the middle of the target and then He takes care of all the outer rings of your life. And that’s just been a sweet thing for me because I think for years I tried to do it all. You know, I tried to be the radio Christian music artist and travel and be the mom and all that stuff. But now as I’m just focusing on being a mom, He truly has allowed us to have some opportunities that I never could have done. I never could have orchestrated. Only He could do that and there’s order in our home. Whereas before it was chaos, you know, when I tried to do it all.

[Easley:] Yeah. Yeah.

[Nockels:] So it’s just been a real sweet thing. And my kids are different people, they’re different children because of it, so I’m just so grateful, I really am.

[Easley:] That’s an extraordinary comment, Christie, because so many of our friends are so seduced by success, by ministry, by whatever, that seem the world tugs on us. We’re talking to Christie Nockels. If you know Watermark, if you know Passion, if you know great names like Point of Grace, Charlie Hall, Ed Cash, Louie and Shelley Giglio, Shane & Shane, Chris Tomlin, you’ve been ministered to by and alongside Christie Nockels.

Christie, you and Nathan, obviously you guys are a team, but it’s Christie. What’s it look like in a marriage relationship with submission and leadership when it’s “Christie Nockels?”

[Nockels:] [laughter] Well, it’s interesting. I mean, we kind of just went to that because I was doing a lot of women’s events, and I still am. And that’s really my heart. If I had to nail it down, like, Christie, what’s your heart as far as ministry? I would say, “Eighteen to thirty year old women.”

[Easley:] Huh.

[Nockels:] And so, it’s just been easier for that because when we go and do these women’s events, I’m able to take over kind of just relationally with those women and I kind of get right into what we’re doing for the weekend. If I’m doing a conference and I go to the prayer meetings and I’m in on all that stuff, whereas Nathan, he kind of now just has the freedom to, he still has the exact same role. He goes with us, he travels and, you know, he’s in charge of making the music and all of that sound amazing when we get in that moment of worship. But it’s also freed him up to be able to build his production side of things.

He produces, we have a studio in our home, and he produces for many, many Christian artists and worship leaders and does records in our basement. And that has really allowed him to say yes more, because we’re doing so much less during the year as far as traveling. And so he’s able to kind of do that and then, actually he loves it because he doesn’t have to do the photo shoots anymore. He doesn’t, you know, have to do all the stuff that he was never really that comfortable with anyway. And so, he’s actually pretty happy. [laughter]
[Easley:] That’s good. Now, let’s talk a little bit about the tension of worship leading and performing. In Christian music as well as in communication there is a fine line between when you’re leading and helping others worship and then when you’re the entertainer and the performer. How have you navigated that?

[Nockels:] Well, I think, you know, we started out as worship leaders twelve years ago and that’s always been our heart. And I think we went into the Christian industry, the music industry, pretty naïve, I would say. Pretty innocent. Just thinking that what we’re doing is going to translate and there’s never going to be that tension because our heart is ministry and our heart is worship leading. But there definitely was that tension. We walked through it for eight years and, you know, I think for us, it never switches back and forth in my heart.

As I go in front of an audience of people and, even if it’s a song that’s maybe not a corporate song that everyone’s singing, my heart is still in prayer. That’s the best way I can translate that is just that as I walk onto a stage, my heart is in prayer for those people to understand it. Because I believe God uses music that powerfully that it can bypass whatever we’ve gone through that day, whatever circumstance we’re in. It can bypass the intellect and it can go straight to our soul somehow. He’s the creator of it and He uses it powerfully like that by His spirit.

And I come in prayer and even when I sing a song like “Knees to the Earth” or, you know, something that’s just like an album song, I’m singing every word as a prayer. And I think, that’s just where I come from. I don’t know that I’ve ever said, “I really want to perform for people-”

[Easley:] But there’s a seduction, isn’t there? I mean, you’ve got a room full of people, you’ve got people in line to see you, they’re buying your CDs. Pretty tempting stuff. Pretty heady stuff.

[Nockels:] Yeah. And I think, for me, that was why I just wanted to get away from the concert setting.

[Easley:] Mmm hmm.

[Nockels:] I don’t mind doing it a few times a year, but for me, I recognized that if I had the choice to go do an amazing concert with some of the most amazing, biggest Christian artists, or even secular artists in our country, and I could be a part of that and I could perform and it would just be this big blow out thing; or would you like to get in a room with two hundred and fifty college age girls and have a worship and teaching time that is life changing. I would say every single time, hands down, I’m going to choose to be in the room with the two hundred and fifty college age girls.

[Easley:] Wow. Wow.

[Nockels:] And that was really telling for me once I was just - Nathan and I would do that with each other. We’d say, “Okay, if you had the choice to do this or this.” And after awhile we were just like, “I think we’ve been doing the wrong thing,” you know? [laughter] Or, I think it’s time, you know, to move towards having those kinds of opportunities and being free. And I think what the word that God just kept laying on our
hearts was, “Be available.”

[Easley:] Yeah.

[Nockels:] And the situation we were in, we just weren’t available to be able to do those kinds of things and now we have that freedom and it’s just been really amazing.

[Easley:] You mentioned “Knees to the Earth,” “To the Glory of His Name,” You know, you work on this over and over and over and over and then you record it and then you lead people in worship. Give us a glimpse into Christie. How does she write this? How do you get these lyrics in your head? What inspires you?

[Nockels:] Well, I carry around a little digital recorder all the time and I carry it a lot in my car and just in my purse I carry it around. And anything, really, can inspire me. You know, sometimes it’s something that my kid’s say. It’s a conversation that we have that turns into a big teaching moment and I get rebuked by the Lord through my children [laughter] which is always funny.

[Easley:] Yeah.

[Nockels:] Or, you know, a series that my pastor’s doing or I’ll write things down or if I’m reading the Word I’ll write things down, stuff that just inspires me. And I kind of just keep a journal and I also keep this digital recorder of melodies, even. Sometimes it’s just a melody that’ll come. I just will start humming things and that’s how I just kind of, we accumulate these things and then when we come together it’ll form something.

“Knees to the Earth” was an experience we had. Sometimes it’s an experience. “Glory of Your Name” was written from watching the movie The Passion of the Christ. And “Knees to the Earth” was from a live event that we did for Passion that came just the night before we were to sing that on the platform. And so a lot of times it’s even just a moment in time. It’s all kind of different.

[Easley:] We’re talking to Christie Nockels on inContext today. Earlier, Christie, you mentioned Psalm thirty-seven. Let’s circle back to that.

[Nockels:] Mmm hmm. It’s been a sweet thing to tell the Lord, through this whole transition, as ending the Watermark journey and kind of moving into the unknown, so to say. This is going to sound crazy, but I was cleaning my toilet one morning, and I realized just that I had this fulfillment in me that I never imagined that I could have.

And I’m saying, “Lord, why do I feel this right now as I’m cleaning my toilet?”

And I think it was just the Lord showing me that, as I was saying before, as I focus in on my home and the things that He’s put right in front of me, that there’s going to be this fulfillment there.

And if you back up, before Psalm 37:5, it’s verse four, and it says, “Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.”

And I’ve always read that as, “If I do this, then He will do this,” you know? But I think the Lord just began to reveal to me that He will give me the desires of my heart.
Meaning that He will show me what my desires are to be. And as I change from one season of life to the other, my desires changed.

So I realized, “Lord, I’ve been doing all this stuff for ten years and it was wonderful stuff.”

I mean, getting to sing on the stage with some of the sweetest people that I’ve ever met in my life and I’m so grateful for the Watermark journey.

“But, Lord, why do I feel this fulfillment this morning as I’m cleaning my home?”

And He just showed me that He’s going to show my what my desires are to be. He’s going to place those in me. And then it says, “Commit your way to the Lord and He will do this, that He will make your righteousness shine like the noon day sun.”

And I just was so taken back by that. That it’s His cause and His desire that He puts in me. It’s His to promote and the more that I focus in on these kids and this home that He’s given us, the more that He takes that cause and that desire and He takes it to the ends of the earth however He sees fit.

And He’s really been doing that. And, I mean, just getting to be a part of these Passion regional events this past year. I got to go to Boston and Chicago and L.A. and D.C. and Dallas and then we’re headed to Atlanta. Getting to be with these college students, I never imagined I could lead worship for a sweeter group of college students that are so sitting on the edge of their seat waiting for someone to tell them how to give their lives away.

[Easley:] Yeah. Yeah.

[Nockels:] And I’m just so grateful. You know, as I look back on that verse: Commit your way to the Lord. Trust in Him and He will do these things. He will take that desire and He will use it because it’s His.

And that’s just been a great revelation in my life and I’m so grateful. That’s just the word that keeps coming to my mind. Just so grateful that God showed us and that we didn’t get down the road and our kids be twenty years old and us have regret that we didn’t stop and kind of breathe and just go, “Okay.” You know, this is what God’s called us to. So that’s been really precious.

[Easley:] You’re working on a project right now.

[Nockels:] Yes, we are. We’re slowly just working on something in our basement.

[Easley:] Mmm hmm.

[Nockels:] Really because I’ve been doing these conferences or different retreats or things for women and they want to go home with the music. They want something new and so we’re just trying to kind of do that slowly and pay for it ourselves and whatever happens with it will. And we’re excited about it. It feels good to just be writing again and that coming from a real pure place again just feels really, really good.

[Easley:] Do you have a release date?
[Nockels:]  We don’t.  We’re hoping at least by the end of the year.

[Easley:]  Okay.  Can you give us any insights into what you’re working on?

[Nockels:]  Well, it’ll definitely be more corporate worship.  It’ll be a mix still, probably, but definitely more on the side of corporate worship that we’ll be able to lead.  Some of it we’re already leading and people are saying, “When can I get that song?”

And some of them we lead at our church and so it will be more kind of towards the worship leading and corporate kind of worship songs.  So, we’re excited about it.

[Easley:]  Christie Nockels, thank you so much for spending some time with us on inContext.

[Nockels:]  Thanks for having me.

[Easley:]  God bless you.

[Lepine:]  And, once again, we’re looking forward to Christie being here on the Moody Campus for Founder’s Week in a couple of weeks.  If our listeners would like more information about the speakers and the artists who are going to be there for Founder’s Week, you can come to our website, incontextradio.org.  We have a link there that will get you the Founder’s Week information.  All of the details, again, are on our website, incontextradio.org.

And we hope if you live in the Chicagoland area or if you live outside and would like to come in and be a part of Founder’s Week, again, get the details and plan to join us for all of the activities that take place that week here in downtown Chicago.

And I hope you have a great weekend.  Hope you can be with us again on Monday when we continue our study through John’s Gospel.  That’s Monday on inContext with Michael Easley.