

# Altitude

Stories of Impact 2024





Altitude is a mid-year publication on selected stories of impact through the ministries of College Park Church and the lives of its members. You are receiving this because of your partnership in the gospel ministry of College Park. You have played a role in each of these stories.

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## Pre-eminence of Jesus

While many things vie for priority in life, we are committed to centering our lives on Jesus—our Savior, our Lord, the Way to the Father, our example and enabler, our High Priest, and the One who is worthy of our worship and total allegiance. The main thing is to keep the Main One (Jesus) the main thing.

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# Intentional Living

By Amy Spencer

The Niedermeyers, married since 1966, both accepted Christ early in life, but, by their own admission, spent the first forty years of their marriage as pew sitters. After moving from Michigan to Indianapolis in 2005, the couple started attending College Park at the behest of their new neighbors.

Then in 2006, Jeanne learned she had kidney cancer. One of the Niedermeyers' first calls was to the church. "The elders and pastors got together with us, and we had a time of prayer, confession, and healing," remembers Jeanne. "That was a huge turnaround. Our lives and priorities changed right then."

"We weren't originally focused on a lot of Jesus-centered things. The shaping and sharpening that has happened over our years at College Park has dramatically changed that."

Dick agrees, and adds, "We realized that at College Park we were hearing solid preaching about a personal relationship with Christ—which had been missing up to that point in both our lives."

As their relationship with Christ deepened, their focus radically changed. "When we retired, we had a vision of what our retirement was going to be: lots of travel and golf," reflects Dick. "We weren't originally focused on a lot of Jesus-centered things. The shaping and sharpening that has happened over our years at College Park has dramatically changed that."

In addition to being involved in men's and women's Bible studies, they now prioritize time with Jesus together. On as many mornings as they can, they start their day studying the Word and praying as a couple. They say that this intentional choice helps them keep Christ at the forefront of their minds on a daily basis.

And their intentionality extends far beyond their personal time with Jesus.

"Another thing we've done to keep God in front of us is to be thankful for everything," Jeanne explains. "There's so much to be thankful for, and we try to regularly express our gratitude to God, even for the little things."

Looking for opportunities to lift others up in prayer is also important to the Niedermeyers. When they eat out, they always ask their server, "How can we pray for you?" Additionally, Jeanne looks for opportunities to pray with people at work and in day-to-day life. Over the years,

they've heard many stories and have had the privilege of praying for and speaking into the lives of countless people.

Dick is also intentional about serving his neighbors—from mowing grass and clearing snow for single women in the neighborhood to loaning out his tools and helping with home maintenance projects. "People can see Jesus in you in a lot of different ways," Dick shares. "You are glorifying God when you have an attitude of serving others."

The Niedermeyers' acts of service aren't only limited to their neighborhood though. A 2007 Vision Trip to Hungary became the starting point of a legacy for them. They are now preparing for their fifteenth trip to Hungary, where they will lead a team who will serve at the Word of Life summer camp. Over the years, they've witnessed many youths come to Christ, assisted with construction projects, and poured into the lives of the camp's staff and workers.

Here at College Park, you'll see Dick and Jeanne serving at THINK conferences and other events, filling in at the reception desk during the week, and lending a helping hand in whatever way they can. "We're not a perfect couple by any means," Jeanne emphasizes, "but we try to be intentional about our lives and how we are serving."

In a world where our time and attention can be pulled in so many directions, the Niedermeyers provide us with a good reminder that intentionality in decisions, both big and small, help us keep the Main One the main thing.

To learn about serving opportunities at College Park, go to **[yourchurch.com/serve](https://yourchurch.com/serve)**.

"You are glorifying God when you have an attitude of serving others."





## Authority of the Word

The Bible is the foundation of who we are, what we believe, and everything we do. We are committed to preaching, teaching, counseling, sharing, and living by the sufficiency of the whole counsel of God because it contains everything we need for life and godliness. Real life change is found in the Spirit-empowered Word, not our ideas, thoughts, or opinions. God's Word is written in ink while our plans and theologies are in pencil.

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# Who We Are

By Jake Brothers

On a beautiful weekend in May 2023, sixteen songwriters went on a two-day retreat to write worship songs inspired by the book of Ephesians. Each of us in the group, a combination of Worship Arts staff and volunteers, came to the lake house retreat with an idea for a song and a heart ready to worship and collaborate.

Something beautiful happened as these creatives came together. We spent time in groups of three to four, creating lyrics and melodies inspired by God's Word. Then we came back together to share the work we had accomplished. Along with sharing our creative gifts with one another, we enjoyed the gifts of fellowship, laughter, and prayer. It was one of those gatherings where you walk away saying, "Surely, God was among us."

In just two days, sixteen songs were written, each one reiterating themes from our sermon series in Ephesians, *Becoming Who We Are*. Sometimes it takes weeks or even months to write a song, but in just two days the Holy Spirit gave us melodies and word after word that flowed from the power and authority of God's Word.

"We're saved by grace, through faith, created in Jesus to do good works and we will walk in them, we will walk with him."

God inspired lyrics such as these from Ephesians 1 and 2: "Dead men don't sing, but dead's not the end. You don't stay dead when the Christ calls you friend. Dead men don't sing unless they are raised, and our mighty Savior has conquered the grave." And "We're saved by grace, through faith, created in Jesus to do good works and we will walk in them, we will walk with him."

In the weeks following this special retreat, we brainstormed how we should steward the songs God had given us. We prayerfully decided to introduce these songs to the congregation on Sunday mornings as we continued through the sermon series on Ephesians.

And the dream grew from there: We decided to record each song live in the sanctuary during Sunday morning worship with the hope of producing an album to give people access to these songs outside of Sunday mornings.

Through the recording process, many more volunteers were able to be involved in the creation of the new music. As each song was introduced on a given Sunday, whoever was on the worship team and production team that day got to be a part of recording and producing. Because the teams change every Sunday, a variety of people were included in the production of each song.

After several months of introducing, recording, mixing, and mastering songs live on Sundays, we had a nine-song album. On January 12, 2024, we released *Who We Are*.

What a joy it was to dive deep into God's Word and collaborate with so many gifted people within the Worship Arts Ministry at College Park. The songs God inspired beautifully display the power and authority of his Word, rehearsing the gospel truth that in Christ we are no longer dead to sin, but alive in him. We proclaim together with confidence, "This is our hope, who we are in Jesus Christ!"

To download *Who We Are*, go to **[yourchurch.com/howeare](http://yourchurch.com/howeare)**.

To learn more about the Worship Arts Ministry, go to **[yourchurch.com/worshiparts](http://yourchurch.com/worshiparts)**.







## Redemptive Community

We are broken people loved by the Father, redeemed by Jesus, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We strive to minister God's love by repairing the brokenness and bringing those who are lost to sin into restoration, by the power of the crucified and resurrected Lord Jesus. Our focus is Jesus; our authority is the Word; our dependence is prayer; and our aim is Christ-likeness as we live together as the community of God's redeemed.

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# Learning to Manage Anxiety

By Kayla Pugh

In the fall of 2021, Ian Rose and his wife, Rachel, made their second attempt to relocate to Florida. By all accounts it offered them an ideal set of circumstances, but when the unknowns surrounding job options, cost of living, and moving to another state became overwhelming, Ian started to spiral.

Their previous attempt at a job relocation, in 2020, had ended quickly when it became clear it was not a good fit. Now, while trying to relocate a second time, Ian realized his anxiety was a real issue.

Finding themselves back in Indy in the fall of 2022, the couple sought counseling at College Park, where they have been members since 2010. After an intake session with a counselor, Ian joined a pilot group called Managing Anxiety Cohort in early 2023.

“I needed to be reminded that when you’re in community with other people with similar struggles, it’s encouraging to remember you’re not alone.”

The goal of this cohort is to help participants learn to notice, name, and diffuse anxiety in everyday life by bringing together anxiety

management tools and the truth of the gospel. Ian didn’t know what to expect, but he felt that if College Park was putting it on, then it was going to be good.

“After the first night, I was already hopeful,” Ian recalls. He was one of ten participants who met every other week for several months. That first night set the tone for creating a safe space to share, and the calming presence of the group leader helped absorb any uncertainty. Add a deep couch and some mismatched armchairs, and it felt like a cozy living room rather than a counseling group.

What stood out to Ian after that first group meeting was how the other participants shared in his struggle with anxiety. “I needed to be reminded that when you’re in community with other people with similar struggles, it’s encouraging to remember you’re not alone.”

Anxiety grows in times of loneliness and isolation like kindling to a flame—the more it’s stoked, the more it builds. Surrounding yourself with safe people and sharing from a place of vulnerability dumps a bucket of water on that kindling of anxiety so it doesn’t continue to grow.

“There’s so much stigma attached to anything that impacts cognitive function,” Ian says as he

recounts his group experience. “The church is not immune. However, within the cohort there was never a moment when I felt like I was just a problem to be solved or that I was somehow less of a Christian for having this struggle.”

During the cohort, Ian learned practical tools for managing anxiety, including a deeper understanding of the mind/body connection. “I knew I was anxious, but I couldn’t tell you why,” Ian remembers.

Through the tools presented in the group, Ian learned how to identify triggers, name what was making him anxious, and begin to diffuse his anxiety before it started managing him. All the while, reminding himself that his identity is in Christ and not in his struggle with anxiety.

Learning these tools in the context of community enhanced the experience. Doing the work of change is hard, but as Ian shares, “When you have a dynamic sounding board in real time, that’s much more powerful than independent study.”

Ian continues to speak with people about his life-changing experience and how he uses the tools he learned. This fall, he will even be leading a cohort of his own.

His encouragement is simple: “If you struggle with anxiety, go to this group.” It can be hard to see redeeming qualities when you’re in the middle of a trial. But as Ian puts it, “I had to remind myself that God makes beauty from ashes. Now I see how God has used what was admittedly one of the darkest times of my life for his glory.”

To learn more about Soul Care groups, go to [\*\*yourchurch.com/soulcare\*\*](https://yourchurch.com/soulcare).

“Within the cohort there was never a moment when I felt like I was just a problem to be solved or that I was somehow less of a Christian for having this struggle.”





## Biblical Unity in Diversity

Within the framework of sound doctrine, we value an atmosphere of theological freedom with humility and a non-divisive spirit. We want to reflect the unified beauty of Father, Son, and Spirit, participating in the building of the multi-faceted Kingdom of our triune God. In our theological systems, our ministry forms, and our personal relationships, we are committed to biblical unity in diversity.

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# The Back of the Bus

By Garlando Lewis

**F**ull? The bus is full? We're not leaving for another twenty-five minutes! How can the bus be full? It was 5:05 a.m., and our scheduled departure time was 5:30. My wife and I had purposely shown up early; I'd even intentionally run a red light on our way to get here faster. But somehow the front and middle of the bus were already occupied.

As I walked toward the back of the bus, where the few seats remained, a sense of dread and disappointment came over me. I had been looking forward to coming on this trip, but now, seeing no seats were left around the people I already knew, I couldn't help but feel a sense of discomfort.

Oh, the irony, that on this trip to experience the important landmarks of the Civil Rights Movement, my wife and I, both African American, would be sitting at the back of the bus.

*"I'm here to learn along with everyone else and to deepen my understanding by experiencing these historical locations in person."*

I surveyed the group of people already there. Two white couples and a mixed-race couple, none of whom I knew very well. As my wife followed me to the two remaining seats, I fought to hide my discomfort.

When the bus was leaving the parking lot, one of the men sitting in front of me said, "You'll never believe what we saw on our way here. We were sitting at 96th and Meridian when a car ran the red light. And get this, its license plate said 'In Christ'!"

*Of course, of course someone had seen it. Well, nothing like a little humor to start off the trip. So, I leaned forward and said, "It was me."*

And with that the 2023 Biblical Unity Vision Trip commenced to the tittering laughter of the other couples at the back of the bus.

As the morning progressed and we all awoke from the fog of the early departure, we started sharing what we hoped to learn on the trip. To ease any tensions my white brothers might be feeling, I shared, "I'm not on this trip to accuse white people of past wrongs done to African Americans. I'm here to learn along with everyone else and to deepen my understanding by experiencing these historical locations in person." This moment of intentional vulnerability was, for me, the first step in bonding our back-of-the-bus group together.

When we reached our first destination, the Birmingham Civil Rights Museum and 16th Street Baptist Church, we each explored on our own or with our spouse. The next morning Pastor Mark

asked us to write a lament on our experience there.

As we shared our laments, the raw emotion and vulnerability expressed bonded our little group together even more. One member shared this lament:

“There is such immense brokenness in the beautiful world you created. You began with man and woman in your own image and said it was very good. Yet the things we experienced yesterday were very bad! People ripped from their homes and families, precious people treated as property to be senselessly tortured, beaten, and killed. . . . Lord, continue to soften my heart to seek understanding and to have deep relationships with my minority brothers and sisters. Help me to trust you to judge justly and help me to walk obediently to love your people radically.”

From that point forward, after we explored each stop or exhibit, we sought each other out to process and lament what we’d seen. On the bus between stops, we further bonded over laughter and shared experiences. Over the five-day trip, we became known by the rest of the Biblical Unity Vision Trip participants as the “back of the bus crew.”

When the trip came to an end, we realized we didn’t want the laughter, lamenting, and encouragement to stop, so we made plans to meet up again. Since the trip, we’ve regularly met at one another’s homes for meals and continue doing life together. We’ve met each other’s children, supported one another through job changes, and prayed for and encouraged each other.

What I had looked upon with dread—sitting at the back of the bus—God used for his purpose, knitting together a group of strangers from different backgrounds, ethnicities, and viewpoints to write his story on our hearts.

To view biblical unity resources, go to **[yourchurch.com/unityresources](https://yourchurch.com/unityresources)**.





## Extravagant Grace

We desire to be a community of believers who treat others with the same extravagant grace that God has lavished upon us. We yearn to demonstrate this grace through our church culture and our lives in a way that is transparent, real, and helpful. We are blessed to be a blessing to each other, the city of Indianapolis, and the world.

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# A Sister in Need

By Bjorn Carlson

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. – 1 John 3:16-18

Christ's extravagant grace to us is that he laid down his life for us. The apostle John calls us to follow his example by displaying this same extravagant grace to our brothers and sisters in need. College Park and its partner ministry, Heart of a Man (HOAM), have teamed up to do just that.

Men's discipleship is at the core of what HOAM does. But along with weekly Bible studies and discipleship groups, the leadership team of HOAM, comprised of College Park members, has deployed HOAMWork, which partners with local churches like College Park to serve widows and the widow-like. This branch of HOAM's ministry seeks to fill the void where a man is not present by performing labor-intensive, and often difficult, home maintenance and repair tasks.

Early this year, for example, College Park Compassion Ministries alerted HOAM of a leaking sink repair needed for Ruth Anne, a single, wheelchair-bound, College Park member

HOAMWork deployed immediately to meet the need.

When they assessed Ruth Anne's home, they saw this sister living in a home that had fallen into disrepair—well beyond a leaky sink. Black mold and water damage created an unhealthy living situation. She struggled to maneuver around her house, which was not designed for wheelchair access. Seeing her situation, the Spirit moved in the hearts of the HOAM leadership team.

The concern was so deep that one of the HOAM leaders thought, "She will be dead in three weeks if we don't do something. We cannot see what we've seen and not take action."

The team agreed that a "band-aid" solution was not going to work—something bigger was needed.

They came back to College Park with a monumental recommendation: totally renovate her house. This would require remediating the mold and rot and changing the layout of the kitchen, hallways, and bathroom to be wheelchair accessible. The goal? To create a sustainable, healthy home for Ruth Anne to live in for many years to come.

"The result was a beautiful reflection of the extravagant grace God has shown to each one of us."

It was a big vision that would require significant resources and time.

Through the incredible dedication of the HOAM team, the generosity of the broader College Park family, donors within HOAM, and external grants available to individuals in situations similar to Ruth Anne's, the body of Christ came together in a way that will radically change her life. The result was a beautiful reflection of the extravagant grace God has shown to each one of us.

Ruth Anne's health is already improving since being out of the mold-ridden air, and she's now almost completely off her daily supplemental oxygen.

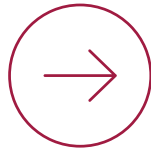
While Ruth Anne's living conditions were being overhauled, so were the hearts of the men of HOAM who volunteered on the project. God used Ruth Anne's physical needs to mobilize a great number of men to service, allowing them to experience the joy and spiritual growth that comes through gospel-driven sacrificial service. The difference can be seen and felt on Sunday mornings where these men now move toward the widows and widow-like at College Park, greeting them with hugs and conversation, further living out the extravagant grace of Christ.

To learn more about how to be involved in meeting the needs of the church family, go to **[yourchurch.com/compassion](https://yourchurch.com/compassion)**.

To learn more about serving with HOAMWork, go to **[yourchurch.com/hoamwork](https://yourchurch.com/hoamwork)**.

“The team agreed that a ‘band-aid’ solution was not going to work—something bigger was needed.”





## The Call to Go

All of us are called to be Spirit-empowered catalysts for life change in our areas of personal influence. We approach ministry with a passionate resolve to equip the saints to engage our culture, addressing the most pressing problems, and reaching the neediest people in our city and the world. While the body of Christ is made up of a variety of gifts, the calling is the same: GO!

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# Caring for the Orphan

By Melody Gandy

**I**n November 2022, Jordan and Paige Gillenwater anxiously awaited the arrival of two precious children, a pair of siblings placed with them through foster care. Married for two years, the Gillenwaters both had a heart to love and serve children in the foster care system. Their desire was birthed from a passion God gave them at a young age to care for children, walk alongside families, and see families reunified.

On that chilly November day when Bay (age 2½) and Ben (age 1½) were dropped off along with their few belongings, Jordan and Paige's home and hearts were forever changed.

Learning the children's story and the brokenness they came from was heartbreaking. The Gillenwaters were soon thrust onto the roller coaster of a broken system—managing visits with biological family members, court hearings, and family team meetings—in addition to learning how to care for two little ones who saw them as loving but also as strangers.

“Being a part of the care community has been a constant reminder of God's faithfulness, his provision, and that he loves these children more than we do.”

A few weeks after learning of the new foster placement, Family Advocacy Ministry at College Park Church formed a care community for the Gillenwaters. This is a team of six to eight volunteers who come alongside foster families, providing wraparound support through practical, emotional, and spiritual help.

Nationally, 50 percent of foster parents quit after their first year or their first placement. With the support of a care community, though, 90 percent of foster parents make it through the first year, meaning they foster longer and stronger.

Paige shares, “God has used our care community to not only bring us community within College Park but to help carry us through the hard seasons of confusion and waiting.”

Having a team surround them with comforting hugs, powerful prayers, and weekly meals has helped them feel cared for. Paige says they have felt a sense of divine protection they know comes from the prayers of their care community.

“When you are doing foster care, you really want to root for the biological parents, but sometimes that is difficult to do when things get hard and messy,” she explains. “Having people who are removed from the situation come alongside and pray the prayers that you are struggling to pray is such a help.”

Leslie Carter serves as the team leader for the Gillenwaters' care community. Leslie shares, "It has been a privilege to pray and walk alongside the Gillenwater family. Being a part of the care community has been a constant reminder of God's faithfulness, his provision, and that he loves these children more than we do. It has been a joy watching God sustain Jordan and Paige during hard trials."

God may not call you to bring a child into your home, but he does call all of us to go and care for the most vulnerable in our communities. James 1:27 instructs us to care for orphans and widows, two of the most marginalized and vulnerable groups in James' day. With approximately twelve thousand children in foster care in Indiana, we are surrounded with opportunities to go and show these vulnerable children and families the love of Jesus.

Paige encourages, "Everyone should be doing something to support children in foster care. There are so many ways to do that. You can send an encouraging text, write a card, pray, provide meals, or babysit. It may seem small, but it is important gospel work."

To learn more about Family Advocacy Ministry, go to **[yourchurch.com/fam](https://yourchurch.com/fam)**.

"God has used our care community to not only bring us community within College Park but to help carry us through the hard seasons of confusion and waiting."

# Igniting a Passion to Follow Jesus

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