## ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER



Volume 2 Issue 3

## Paradox (Stone of help)



Over the past two months, we've focused on ways to become more aware of ourselves. Listening to our bodies makes it possible for us to try softer. We try softer by giving ourselves enough grace to find balance in a world of competing pressures.

Trying softer means that instead of holding on tighter and pushing through our struggles, we slow down and take in the sensations felt throughout our bodies.

Trying softer means living out the idea found in Psalm 46, "Be still, and know that I am God!" And often, it means giving up controlling things we can't control. We conclude part two of our series with the subject of surrender.

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## July 3, 2022



You may continue to wear your masks when in the building, if you feel more comfortable, but is not necessary.



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## Nuanced (Through the keyhole)



Looking back at themes over the past several months, I noticed that we began 2022 in a conversation about the political divide in our country. For example, in my January 9 article, I wrote about the anniversary of the January 6 attack on the U.S. capital. But the most impact-

ful research for me was what I learned about the process of dehumanization.

Brené Brown writes that "Once we see people on 'the other side' of a conflict as morally inferior and even dangerous, the conflict starts being framed as good versus evil. Dehumanization is the most significant driver of insurrection and it always starts with language."

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## Nuanced (Through the keyhole) ... cont from page 1

As the year progressed, it became apparent that our collective mental and emotional health was under attack. The impact of the pandemic, exacerbated by blatant illustrations of injustice and dehumanization as a political strategy, pushed us out of our windows of tolerance. We found ourselves cast into the chaos of disconnection from people we care about but whose political views we simply can no longer tolerate.

After Easter, we began a journey of discovery to reclaim our well-being and to walk through the keyhole with a fresh perspective. Our journey was guided initially by Aundi Kolber and her insightful book, Try Softer. We called our journey Masterpiece to draw attention to the divine intention that resulted in our being. We are each a masterpiece created by a loving God on purpose. But we enter a broken world that oftentimes conspires to take us away from our divine purpose.

The late Chadwick Boseman, in his commencement address at Brown University in 2018, offered this insight into purpose based on his personal experience as an actor:

Purpose is an essential element of you. It is the reason you are on the planet at this particular time in history. Your very existence is wrapped up in the

things you are here to fulfill. Whatever you choose for a career path, remember, the struggles along the way are only meant to shape you for your purpose.

Meanwhile, political conversations are usually off-the-table in mixed companies where "mixed" is equated to blue and red. Finding ways to get along proved difficult enough without having my character questioned because I believe that deadly weapons shouldn't be readily available to the public at large.

Over the past decade, Asbury has emerged as a community leader in finding ways for residents to connect with God, each other, themselves, and our planet. Connections that take place in mixed company. We offer help to whoever asks, regardless of their political or religious views and regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation. And we don't check ID or membership cards.

This reality makes disagreements both imminent and essential. We're trying to get it right as much as possible, which means we need diverse people and ideas.

As we begin part three of our series, *Masterpiece*, we're risking the potential of even more ridicule than we've received for our pursuit of "all means all." Why? Because we're planning to

talk about a few of the more controversial political topics. This includes abortion, climate, gun control, healthcare, public support (formerly welfare), immigration, racism, trade, and voting. Of course, all of this is within the context of the separation of church and state.

Our goal has nothing to do with influencing how people vote. We're trying hard not to take sides while being honest about our biases. Our goal is to improve our ability to engage in conversations with people with different opinions and who vote differently than us. However, if you're agenda is to restrict voting in any way, this is one area where you may want to disengage. We live in a democracy so far, and democracies need everyone to have a voice and vote. But it's your choice. This is the beauty of freedom.

And the timing couldn't be better as our first Sunday corresponds with our nation's celebration of freedom. According to history.com, Philadelphia was the first city to celebrate this day on July 4, 1777. The Revolutionary War was fought and won by immigrants who came to this continent to find a better life. And for most, it was a new beginning.

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## In Our Prayers

Kevin Croom

Sylvia Pittman

Shirley Craig

Richard Oram

Chris Freeman

## FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES WHO ARE HOMEBOUND OR IN NURSING CARE

Nancy Elston

Elaine Lamoreaux

Norma Buzzard

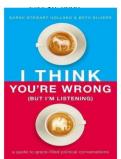
Mary Nations

## PASTOR BOOK CLUB NEWS

Pastor Book Club is still meeting via Zoom, but we are also gathering in the Asbury Library Conference Room at 12Noon every Wednesday, unless otherwise noted.

Please call the Church Office for more information, as things could change (810-235-0016).

July's month book series is called, "I Think You're Wrong



(But I'm Listening). A guide to grace-filled political conversations, by Sarah Stewart Holland & Beth Silvers.

Thank you and everyone continue to stay safe!

## COMING UP THIS WEEK JULY 4 -JULY 10



July 4 Mon

July 5 Tues 10:00am-12:30pm

Food/Water Distribution

July 6 Wed 12 Noon Pastor Book Club

11am-12Noon Food Giveaway at

South Flint Soup Kitchen (No appts)

July 7 Thu

July 8 Fri

July 9 Sat 12 Noon Food Not Bombs

July 10 Sun 10:30am

New Beginnings

Contemporary Worship

(We are live on <u>Facebook</u> and our newly launched <u>YouTube</u> <u>channel</u>. You can find these links along with more information about us on our website at <u>FlintAsbury.org</u>.)

# Asbury Worship Series "Masterpiece"



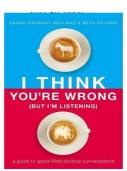
Book Club News

It's tempting to declare that we're beginning a new series on the first Sunday in July. It's tempting for many reasons, so why not just call our next several Sundays by a catchy title and announce a "new" topic? And I love new beginnings.

Instead, welcome to Parts three and four of a series we began the Sunday after Easter called

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On the Wednesday after Easter, we began a new ad-



venture into the slow but rewarding process of selfdiscovery assisted by author and therapist Aundi Kol-

ber and her book *Try Softer*. In parallel to our worship series *Masterpiece*, our Book

Club went deeper into the process of self-discovery. Our journey, so far, is proving to be an exciting exploration of who we are behind our layers of protection.

We continue our exploration beginning in July, assisted by two friends with differing political views but somehow manage to stay good friends. How is this even possible in a world intentionally divided by political candidates into blue and red hats and t-shirts?

Join us each Wednesday in July and find out as we

## Leadership in Worship & Service

Tony, Mirium
Anthony, Jim
Jonathon, Terrance
Mirium
Cyndi
Christine & Norma

Welcome Team
Ushers
Production Team
Children
Worship Leader
Cafe

## Asbury Staff

Rev. Dr. Tommy McDoniel Pastor & Exec Dir
Connie Portillo Office Manager
Sylvia Pittman Empowerment Arts
Jim Craig Board & Leadership Chair

Kevin Croom
Matt DePalma
Chris Freeman
Israel Unger
Kim Sims
Exec Chef & Dir Opers
Farms Manager
South Campus Bldg Mgr
Finance Director
Connections Suprv
Terrance Williams
Arts Center Mgr

read and discuss the book I Think You're Wrong (But I'm Listening).

Whether you're a regular on Sunday mornings, only attend on an occasional holiday, or don't cross the threshold of a church building without coercion, there is something for everyone in this conversation.

Our book choice was written by two working moms from opposite ends of the political spectrum. And their hope is that we can learn that politics don't have to divide us. Instead, we can try to bring the same care and respect that we show at other times to discussions about policy.

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## Asbury Worship Series - Masterpiece ...cont from pg 4

*Masterpiece*. The reason for not creating a more robust line of demarcation between then and now is that we're not finished.

Now that we've begun the work on ourselves that leads to better emotional and mental health, we deserve to feast on the benefits right away. Our rewards begin with taking our newly discovered truths about ourselves on the campaign trail. After all, it's summer, and COVID is finally becoming more of a bad memory than a current threat. In-person gatherings are returning so let's get together and debate the issues.

In parts three and four we continue exploring the masterpiece God is forming in us, assisted by two friends with differing political views but somehow manage to stay good friends. How is this even possible? After all, isn't the world intentionally divided into blue and red?

In our book club article, we learn that the book that parts two and three of our series is based on was written by two working moms from opposite ends of the political spectrum. And our hope is that we can learn that politics don't have to divide us. Instead, we can put what Jesus teaches us into practice in our debates about policy.

I promise that the next several weeks will be challenging. Even if for no one else other than your pastor. I'm a somewhat reluctant participant in this notion of finding agreement with the other side. I've spent most of my life competing in races for which there can be only one winner.

Nevertheless, I also long for a time when debate doesn't bring out the worst in people. So I'm all in for this next leg of our trip. And I hope you are as well.

We'll follow the outline of the book our series is based on. *I Think You're Wrong (but I'm Listening)* brings politics into the front door of the church. But not as a way to influence who you vote for. But, I hope you'll make sure you vote with the confidence that you know where you stand on the issues that matter most to you.

Our theme scripture for this next chapter comes out of John's Gospel. In chapter three we read the story of a Jewish leader named Nicodemus. The chapter begins by providing political context. Nicodemus belonged to the party of the Pharisees. And Jesus was more of an independent who understood both sides of the argument and loved even those with whom He disagreed.

Imagine that!

I pray that you will join us each Sunday morning at 10:30 am. We share our weekly episodes on our *YouTube channel*. We go live at 10:30 am. You can find these links along with more information about us, or join our live broadcast on our *website* at *FlintAsbury.org*.

**Pastor Tommy** 

Sarah Stewart Holland and Beth A. Silvers. I Think You're Wrong (But I'm Listening): A Guide to Grace-Filled Political Conversations. Nashville: Nelson Books, 2019.

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## Paradox (Stone of Help) .... cont. from pg 1

Aundi Kolber, in Try Softer, shares a story about making a breakthrough when she surrendered to the pain during childbirth. She writes that "This is when pain does its best work."

But surrendering seems paradoxical because giving up control feels like a threat rather than a solution. And this is one of our biggest challenges regarding our faith. We say we trust God, and then go on to prescribe what we want from God usually in great detail.

In an article in *Psychology Today*, therapist Nancy Colier points out that we surrender only after every coping strategy we know fails to offer relief. She writes that "Surrender begins here, where all other strategies end. But surrender is not a strategy; it is the profound absence of strategies."

In John's Gospel, Jesus compares Himself to a shepherd who cares for His sheep so profoundly that the sheep thrive. He says that God's purpose for living among humans was motivated by love so strong that once we're aware of its power, we live with abundance. God's promise lies at the center of what every human ultimately wants but too often fails to live into.

We gain more by giving up control. This idea is paradoxical. But what is a paradox?

A paradox is a contradictory statement of two mutually exclusive facts claiming to be true simultaneously. So, for example, God, the Creator of the universe living as a human, is paradoxical. And the gospel stories contain one paradox after another.

Few paradoxes are more confusing than the idea of surrender. Generally, we surrender after every option fails. But, Nancy Colier writes, "Surrender isn't something that our minds can accomplish." In fact, our minds resist surrender with every fiber because surrender feels like an attack on our very survival.

But surrender isn't about giving up altogether. Instead, we surrender trying to control things we don't have control over.

There is a story passed down through the generations about a time when God's people were under attack. The Philistine army was advancing towards them, and the people were afraid because they were outnumbered and outgunned.

As I read this story, I couldn't help but think about the Ukrainian people preparing to defend their country from the impending Russian invasion. I wondered if when their story is told hundreds of years

from now, will their story end in a similar way to this story from 1 Samuel? I wonder if it will be a story of heroism and faith in God ending in triumph?

I have come in order that you might have life in all its fullness.

John 10:10

As the Philistine army approached, the prophet Samuel called out to God for help on behalf of his people. And God responded by throwing the Philistine army into chaos.

I thought back to the earlier weeks of the war in Ukraine when Russian tanks were stalled along the roads leading toward Ukraine. I thought about the news report of the Russian military in chaos. But since then, the Russian army regrouped, and Putin showed that there was no cost too high for the appetite of his ego.

The motivation to hold onto power is always destructive. Arrogance and power are deadly combinations, as we witnessed in our nation's capital last year on January 6.

Independence from the rule of authoritarianism offered a freedom that is only possible in a democracy. But, while the idea of democracy is logical, we've learned that most decisions that matter are highly nuanced. Democracy is frustrating if your intent is to control the opinions of others or to hold onto power that isn't the will of the people for you to have.

Like most radical ideas, the revolutionary war wasn't popular at first. It took ordinary people stepping up and people in power-sharing voice with them for this initial resistance to an authoritarian government to blossom into an experiment in democracy. Thomas Paine was one example.

Thomas Paine was born into poverty and left school at 13 to help support his family. He was fired from a couple of jobs during his young adult years because of his activism promoting higher wages for himself and his coworkers. At age 34, Paine somehow managed to convince Benjamin Franklin to write a letter of recommendation that helped him immigrate to America and land a job as a journalist in Philadelphia.

Paine's breakthrough came during the first year of the conflict, which initially consisted of a relatively small group of colonists. Encouraged by Franklin and a local physician, Paine wrote a 45-page pamphlet that laid out an argument against authoritarian-style government

as represented by the King of England. His pamphlet also included a vision for starting a new form of government representing and serving the people's will.

His pamphlet, titled *Common Sense*, reflected Paine's belief that God gives each person a conscience. And our collective conscience makes a better guide for government than the will of the privileged minority that currently held power over the colonies.

Paine's humble background allowed him to write in a way that resonated with ordinary people. The masses were a diverse group of people who fled oppression to find new opportunities to live in peace based on their own creative energies. Yet there is no statute of Thomas Paine in our nation's capital. This is ironic since his example represents the ideals that make democracy possible.

But what about Paine's premise that God gives all of us a conscience? If this is true, how is dehumanization that destroys democracy even possible?

In Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus, he writes this plea

Be always humble, gentle and patient. Show your love by being tolerant with one another.

**Ephesians 4:2** 

Be always humble, gentle, and patient. Show your love by being tolerant of one another. Do your best to preserve the unity which the Spirit gives by means of the peace that binds you together. There is one body and one Spirit, just as there is one hope to which God has called you. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; there is one God and Father of all people, who is Lord of all, works through all, and is in all (Ephesians 4:2 -6).

While Paul, in this paragraph, doesn't get into the subject of grace, he lays out the anticipated results of allowing God to guide our thoughts and actions. So we begin this part of our work towards discovering the masterpiece God created that is us with this challenge from Ephesians.

But the diversity within our country's borders magnifies one of our core founding principles. A desire to practice the faith of our choice. Paul was Jewish and helped to lead a revolution that we now call Christianity. Our faith is one worldview among many that populate our country. And this alone brings nuance to our conversations.

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| Life Group Questions & Notes:  |
|--|
| Be always humble, gentle, and patient. Show your love by being tolerant with one another.  |
| Ephesians 4:2-6 (GNT)  |
| NOTES FROM WORSHIP   |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |
| QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS  |
| 1. Read what Paul writes to the church in Ephesus in Ephesians 4:2-6. What are some of the obstacles for you in discussing politics with people that don't share your views? What parts of Paul's instructions are the more difficult to follow in these situations?   |
| 2. Read this week's article titled Nuanced. What experiences have you had with political conversations with persons who vote differently than you? What worked? What didn't work? What boundaries do you set and hold when discussing politics? Do you vote in all elections? Why or why not? What obstacles interfere with voting for you? How can these obstacles be overcome? |

3. How can the members of your group help you this week and on-going to help you to be more receptive to hearing and understanding the Word of God? Pray for each other to

have the Holy Spirit bless you with more courage.





A meal goes a long way for a senior living alone, a family struggling to make ends meet, or a child fearful of empty shelves at home. But for the residents of Flint who carry the effects of lead-tainted water, nutrition is critical. Feed Flint provides locally grown, chemical-free, fresh produce to residents living in and around Flint. And we're hoping that you can help us provide 10,000 meals this summer.

Feed Flint includes takeout meals, produce boxes with recipes, and home deliveries as part of our work to guide and support families in moving to sustainable abundance. The reality is that Michigan's food insecurity levels got worse during the COVID-19 pandemic, and this summer's recovery is leaving behind those at the most risk of having to miss meals.

## Flint families continue to struggle with the ongoing effects of the water crisis.

We're bringing together the resources of the Asbury Community Development Corporation. This includes Asbury Farms, the South Flint Soup Kitchen, the Asbury Community Help Center, multiple food pantries, and our Sizzling Culture Mobile Food Trailer. Our plan is to care for our neighbors when they need it most. We accept all people as they are, and our doors are always open to anyone.

Asbury Farms provides locally grown produce used to create fabulous and nutritious meals. Our seed-to-table approach is community-based. This not only helps families make it through emergencies and crises. We help move families towards sustainable abundance.

Our Sizzling Culture program provides jobs and new skills to our city's youth. This includes year-round employment. Our staff and most of our volunteers come from the neighborhoods we support. We call this sustainable abundance because families move from need-based on scarcity to enough based on community-generated abundance.

Our work is also about food and justice. Our vision is a revitalized community where every resident can use their talents and passions for the common good, where children grow into active citizens. And all residents can enjoy safety, good health, and a culture that fosters life-long learning and satisfying lives. This summer, help us address food insecurity and strengthen Flint's budding local food system by supporting the Feed Flint campaign. Thank you for taking the time to see what we're doing and considering how you can help.

Donate to our Feed Flint Campaign by visiting: flintasbury.org/feed-flint-donate









### **ASBURY FARM FRESH**

- TRY OUR WEEKLY VEGGIE BOX FOR \$10.00 -

## SIGN UP FOR A FREE ASBURY FARMS ACCOUNT TODAY

### **AND**

Receive a \$15 credit on your account for your first purchase

## CREATE YOUR OWN VEGGIE BOX

Select what goes in your box from each week's harvest. Get \$5 off your next order when you fill your box with \$15 of produce.

## WANT US TO DECIDE FOR YOU?

Choose Veggie Box Subscription and we will fill your order with a variety of each week's harvest. Pay when you pick up your box. A \$15 VALUE FOR \$10.

\* CONVENIENT PICKUP AT ASBURY OR AT THE SOUTH FLINT SOUP KITCHEN \*

The people were saved, according to scripture, and in recognition of God's intervention, Samuel placed a stone marker. The transliteration of the Hebrew name for this stone marker is Ebenezer — which is translated as the "stone of help." God's people surrendered their well-being into God's hands and God came to their rescue.

Surrendering, in this context, is not about giving in to evil or harmful temptations. Instead, we surrender our attempts at controlling that which is not within our power to control. And we turn to God as our deliverer and anticipate that God will intervene in ways that are ultimately just and in our mutual best interest.

When I see the faces and hear the voices of the Ukrainian people, I don't perceive any thoughts of surrendering to Vladimir Putin's will. Instead, I hear their resolve to cede control to God's will. And I see God's intervention in the world's collective response in support of Ukraine. God brought help to Ukraine through the other nations of the world, but time will tell whether the help given is sufficient.

Ultimately, we do not know what will happen. Instead, we see the massive destruction caused by the ruthless onslaught of violence. Meanwhile, our legislatures debate how to

keep killing machines out of the hands of killers. All the while dealing with the pressures put on them by powerful forces funded by huge profits disguised as cries for freedom. And we the people allowed these influences to contaminate our supreme court through our inaction.

These are hefty issues that affect every one of us. There is much to talk about. Are you willing?

Next week we begin part three of our series, *Master-piece*. Over the next nine weeks, we take what we learned in the first half of our series and apply it to one of the most challenging situations in our nation's history. Politics historically leads to debate because policy matters. But there is a vast difference between debate to discover solutions and the divisive attack ads and speeches that overwhelm our public discourse.

There are subjects we need to discuss, decisions to weigh against our values and votes to cast. I pray that you will be a part of the conversation.

You can join us each Sunday online by going to the button on the homepage of our website - Click here to watch. This button takes you to our YouTube channel. You can find more information about us on our website at FlintAsbury.org.

A reminder that we publish this newsletter that we call the Circuit Rider each week. You can request this publication by email. Send a request to connect@FlintAsbury.org or let us know when you send a message through our website. We post an archive of past editions on our website under the tab, Connect - choose Newsletters.

**Pastor Tommy** 

Content for this series is based in part on? Aundi Kolber. Try Softer: A Fresh Approach to Move Us out of Anxiety, Stress, and Survival Mode--and into a Life of Connection and Joy. Carol Street, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2020.

Nancy Colier. "When It's Time to Let Go of Control and Surrender." © Psychology Today, May 4, 2016. Retrieved from: link. The write-up found on Amazon has this to say about the authors of our next book:

Sarah Stewart Holland, along with Beth Silvers, cohosts Pantsuit Politics podcast, featured in the New York Times, the Atlantic, and named by Apple Podcasts as one of the Best Shows of 2021. Sarah and Beth speak frequently to universities, businesses, and civic organizations about improving political dialogue. Both attended Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky.

Sarah Stewart Holland received her Juris Doctors from American University. She began her career as a congressional staffer, campaign aide, and blogger and social media consultant. She lives in Paducah, Kentucky, where she served a term as a city commissioner and volunteers as a Court-Appointed Special Advocate for children. Beth Silvers received her Juris Doctors from the University of Kentucky. She lives in Union, Kentucky, and serves on several local boards of directors.

If you prefer to avoid groups or live too far away, I encourage you to join us online for our Wednesday gatherings. Alternatively, you can call in by phone, be heard, and hear what others say by calling (929) 436-2866 -- enter the meeting ID, 282 039 5568#.

We are a diverse group, delighted when new people join us. I hope that you will join in on our discussion.

You can contact our office with questions, by phone or simply type your question on our website's homepage — <u>FlintAsbury.org</u>.

Pastor Tommy

# Providing a HOT MEAL and/or local, organic PRODUCE weekly.

**SATURDAYS** starting around 12NOON

**Asbury United Methodist Church** 

1653 Davison Rd, Flint (810) 235-0016

Food Not Bombs is a loose-knit group of independent collectives, sharing free vegan and vegetarian food with others. Flint Food Not Bombs believes that access of food among other necessities of life-should be viewed as a right, not a privilege. Yet in a nation with a military budget many times that of other nations, people continue to go hungry. This is immoral and unjust.

#### **JOIN THE CONVERSATION!**

Facebook.com/flintfoodnotbombs

Twitter.com/flintfnb

Email: flintfnb@protonmail.com

Website: foodnotbombsflint.wordpress.com

We're currently looking for volunteers so we can expand. If interested,

send us a message! Solidarity!

A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.—MLK









# Summer is getting into full swing at the farm!!!

Coming soon, the farm's new twist on a CSA Food Box!!!!

You pick what you want, bring home only the veggies you love!

First Pick-Up date:

<u>July 16th, 11am-1pm</u>



Want more information??

Email: kelly.jewett@outlook.com



There is much to talk about, but we need to set some ground rules, clear boundaries, and allow the Spirit of God to have as much control as possible. Giving up control is never easy. But neither is listening to someone with whom we disagree.

One more thing. I briefly mentioned boundaries earlier, and I don't want to lose the importance of boundaries in any political conversation. But unfortunately, we've seen far too much dehumanization over the past several years. This is s rigid boundary that we plan to hold in all our conversations. And this may mean that we simply refuse to listen to ideas that dehumanize others or attempt to prevent some of us from voting.

You can join us each Sunday online by going to the button on the homepage of our website - Click here to watch. This button takes you to our YouTube channel. You can find more information about us on our website at FlintAsbury.org.

A reminder that we publish this newsletter that we call the Circuit Rider each week. You can request this publication by email. Send a request to connect@FlintAsbury.org or let us know when you send a message

through our *website*. We post an archive of past editions on our website under the tab, Connect - choose *Newsletters*.

**Pastor Tommy** 

Content for this series is based in part on: Sarah Stewart Holland and Beth A. Silvers. *I Think You're Wrong (But I'm Listening): A Guide to Grace-Filled Political Conversations.* Nashville: Nelson Books, 2019.

Aundi Kolber. Try Softer: A Fresh Approach to Move Us out of Anxiety, Stress, and Survival Mode--and into a Life of Connection and Joy. Carol Street, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2020.

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