

ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

Volume 3 Issue 5

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Choices (Trusting God)



Google the expression "How to make good decisions?" and you'll find a long list of articles offering three to twenty-three steps to help you out. Martin G. Moore, writing for *Harvard Business Review*, lists eight recommended steps. For example, this consult-

ant to corporate executives suggests avoiding consensus decisions but favors input from persons closest to activities most impacted.

What he doesn't cover in his article, however, are situations where information isn't available that adds clarity to the likely outcomes. And prayer is missing altogether from the consultant's

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EVERYONE
HAVE A
WONDERFUL
AND SAFE
WEEK!



How? (Belief is a relationship)



According to Dr. Robin Dunbar, a professor of evolutionary psychology at Oxford University, I am fast approaching the age when the number of close relationships I'm likely to maintain is about to plummet.

Professor Dunbar is best known for the number 150. This number rose to fame after the anthropologist published a paper in 1993 that sought to prove that, on average, we can practically maintain around 150 meaningful relationships. Since then, 150 has become known as Dunbar's number.

For those who struggle to stay connected to more than a handful of people, 150 sounds like a lot. But for others who interact with substantially

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higher numbers of contacts through social media, the researcher's numbers seem wildly understated. Either way, I've never lived in a home that accommodated this many people.

Dr. Dunbar's theory is based on the size and importance of our neocortex, the part of the brain responsible for conscious thought. His research suggests that our social networks are limited by our capacity to hold more persons in our conscious minds. By the way, the number 1,500 is how many people you can recognize, according to his study.

Closer to home, according to the theory, we can maintain relationships with around 50 total friends. Add the qualifier "good," and the number drops to 15. Still, our inner circles are limited to around five people who may also appear on our cell phone's favorites list.

Professor Dunbar's research rose again to prominence during the height of COVID as psychologists responded to an increasing caseload of clients experiencing increased stress due to isolation. Also, the pandemic

winding down allows us to rethink navigating our social and professional circles.

Suppose you have a long list of Facebook friends. In that case, you may agree with a more recent study uncovered by New York Times journalist Jenny Gross that questions Dunbar's number. She discovered a group of Swedish researchers who argue that the size of our neocortex is not the limiting factor. According to their study, we can maintain a long list of relationships if we're willing to put in the effort.

When asked about the research that questions his number, Professor Dunbar challenged whether "relationship" in this recent research had the same meaning. Dunbar argues that your relationship is only meaningful if you know them well enough to greet them in an airport lounge without feeling awkward.

There is no doubt that the use of social media to stay connected increased significantly during the pandemic. But on the subject of social media taking us beyond our biological limitations, Dunbar notes that "Having a conversation isn't like

a lighthouse; it is not just blinking away out there, and maybe someone is listening, and maybe somebody is not."

Nevertheless, building and maintaining relationships take time and effort. And this holds true for our relationship with God. And for God to be a part of our inner circle means putting as much time and effort into our relationship with God as those closest to us.

This connection between belief and effort is logical. We can understand it, and we can do something about it. Prayer, reading scripture, fasting, meditation, journaling, worship, music, art, observing the natural world, and conversations with others all contribute to a closer relationship with God.

Paul is credited, or blamed, for instructing us to "pray without ceasing." And while this sounds like Paul had no other friends taking up his time, connecting with God happens when we're not consciously praying or doing any of the things on the earlier list. At least not in the traditional sense.

For example, Isaiah offers a glimpse into the heart of God. We're told that to get closer to God we should share our food with the hungry and give clothes to those who need them (Isaiah 58:7). When we do, we connect with God.

You are like light for the whole world... In the same way your light must shine before people.

Matthew 5:14-16

How do I know this?

Jesus tells us that whenever we offer water to someone thirsty, food to someone hungry, and clothing to someone in need of clothing, it's Him that we're really connecting to (Matthew 25:40). That's the miracle of our friendship with Christ. God's Spirit is always as close as our own breath.

I pray that you'll choose to work on keeping Jesus Christ in your inner circle. He should be first on your favorite list. I'm confident that if you do this, the rest of your inner circle will be glad you do. When doing so, we become like a light on a hill quickly noticed (Matthew 5:15).

And it is through our belief that our relationship with God grows. We all struggle with doubt for a multitude of reasons. It's similar to the highs and lows in our closest relationships. One difference, however, is that God keeps all of His promises and loves us through it all.

Barnabas Piper writes, "Alone we are blind. The Spirit gives sight. Alone we are foolish. The Spirit gives wisdom. Alone we are dead. The Spirit gives life."

You can join us each Sunday in person or online by clicking the button on our [website's](#) homepage - [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: Barnabas Piper. *Help My Unbelief: Why doubt is not the enemy of faith* © Barnabas Piper, 2020. Charlotte : The Good Book Company.

"Dunbar's number: Why we can only maintain 150 relationships." © [BBC.com](#), 2023. Retrieved from: [link](#).

Jenny Gross. "Can You Have More Than 150 Friends?." © New York Times, May 11, 2021. Retrieved from: [link](#)

Upcoming Worship Series



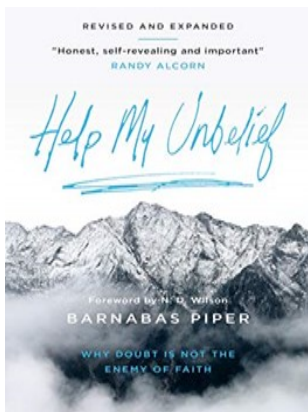
I'm fascinated by science. Unfortunately, my struggles with math limited how far I could progress. Nevertheless, I chose the science of computers as my field of study but focused on utilizing their power in business. Less math was required, and the demand was high. The problem for me was that I enjoyed the company of people more than machines.

Somewhere along the way, I moved further away from God. It was not the fault of science or technology, and I never thought of my situation as not believing. I never stopped believing God created science, scientist, and computer nerds. Nor did I find evidence in science that the universe came from somewhere other than God.

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Book Club News

We completed our series and discussions on *The Wonder of*



Christmas. This series was written and produced by the Skit Guys as an Advent worship

series, and we adapted their content for our use.

As we move into 2023, our first book deals with a subject familiar to every believer. Unbelief is often an under-acknowledged condition of our hearts. And instead of dealing with our unbelief, we choose hypocrisy as an easier road to travel. In other words, what we do is different from what we believe.

means. In doing so, he explains how embracing doubts and questions can help us to get to know God better. His aim is to help us trust God in our everyday lives, even when we don't understand everything we may want to know.

This book encourages us to ask God the hard questions that stand between us and let go of our doubts. Leaving us with the confidence to trust God, even when some questions remain. Initially published in 2015, his revised and updated edition includes biographical stories about Afshin Ziafat, C.S. Lewis, and John Piper.

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Katelin Maylum	Sr Prog Mgr Local Foods
	South Flint Soup Kitchen

In his book, *Help My Unbelief*, Barnabas Piper shares, based on his personal journey, what faith really

Leadership in Worship & Service

Tony, Mirium	Welcome Team
Anthony, Jim	Ushers
Jonathon, Terrance	Production Team
Miriam	Children
Cyndi	Worship Leader
Christine & Norma	Cafe

One reviewer writes this:

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Upcoming Worship Series *...cont from pg 5*

Instead, it was a matter of shifting priorities. God became less important than my ambitions. I tried to keep this shift a secret while not realizing that it's obvious when this happens. And God knows long before we realize it ourselves.

Scripture is full of stories about this happening to people. The results are never good. However, God does not give up on anyone. Some of us are slow learners, and it takes a lifetime to figure it out. Sadly, too many never do and miss out on the joy that accompanies trusting God with everything.

Our new series is based on a book by Barnabas Piper titled *Help My Unbelief*. In his book, he shares his personal journey with doubt and unbelief. And you and I gain insight into what faith really means.

The book title comes from a story found in the Gospel of Mark. A man brings his son, hoping to find a cure for his son's convulsions. When Jesus confronts the man about whether he genuinely believed that his son could be healed, the man asks Jesus, "I do believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:14-29).

It turns out that embracing doubts and questions can help us to get to know God better. So our hope for this series is that each of us will come to trust God in our everyday lives. Even when we don't understand everything we may want to know.

Fortunately, God never gives up on us. N. D. Wilson writes in his forward for the book that "When we cannot see, we are still seen." Jesus searches for the lost in the same way a Shepherd never gives up until a lost sheep is found.

We kick off 2023 with a dive into a struggle that is common to all believers, doubt. Few of us call our condition unbelief. But our unwillingness to be honest with ourselves does not change reality. Until and unless we fully trust God with every aspect of our lives, unbelief has a grip on us.

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

Barnabas Piper. *Help My Unbelief: Why doubt is not the enemy of faith*. © Barnabas Piper, 2020. Charlotte : The Good Book Company.

list. This leads me to wonder whether prayer is also missing from how he makes decisions he faces that impact him personally.

How about you? Do you pray to receive God's input on which choice to make?

Prayer requires at least some belief. And belief is a delicate balance of emotion, logic, and experiences occurring within a personal context. Nevertheless, our beliefs impact our daily decisions. And depending on the perceived impact of a particular decision, emotions usually way heavier than other factors.

Barnabas Piper argues that the most common form of unbelief involves lifestyle conflicts. We express doubt through our thoughts, words, and actions because we choose to believe that God is okay with our choices. He writes that while our questions and doubts matter, they often hide a deeper problem. That is, "a lack of trust in God as God describes himself."

This makes sense. Trust is tough without hard evidence. And trust, faith, and belief are closely related and used interchangeably. So, for instance, I might say that I trust in God because I have faith that God's way is best, and I believe that God is good. Or something like that.

The story of Abraham is one of my favorites. While he is difficult to relate to, overall, who doesn't have reason to admire a man credited with fathering three of the major world religions. And scripture claims that this was all God's doing as part of a divine plan. So all Abraham had to do was trust God to come through.

We're told that Abraham trusted God and that his faith was credited as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). Abraham's adventures in trying to be faithful to God begin with Abraham choosing to leave his homeland to move to some other place that God would disclose later. "Trust me," God said, "It's going to be great!" (Genesis 12:1).

Admittedly, I tend to interpret scripture with great flexibility. While I'm trained to notice the details and nuances, I'm willing to admit that my interpretation may be flawed. And this keeps me from passionate arguments over whether a particular translation best nails the intent of God based on how and which words appear in whichever translation I'm reading. More important, given the infiniteness of God, I'm suspicious of all finite conclusions we draw from scripture.

In the case of Abraham, we can read the text as it's translated and presume that God spoke plainly with audible instructions. And Abraham heard and believed that it was God speaking to him, and he packed up and headed out. No questions, no arguments, no proof of authenticity. Except that life doesn't usually work that way for the rest of us.

The Lord said to Abram, "Leave your country, your relatives, and your father's home, and go to a land that I am going to show you."

Genesis 12:1

What if, instead, Abraham grew restless over time as feelings of emptiness hovered over him. Perhaps he and Sarah dreamed of raising children, but as their senior years loomed over the near horizon, they wondered if there chances for a meaningful life were better elsewhere. What if Abraham believed it was God's idea to leave despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, and God proved him right

Life Group Questions & Notes:

You are like light for the whole world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid... In the same way your light must shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and believe.

Matthew 5:14-16

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS

1. Read Matthew 5:14-16. What does it mean to be a light on a hill? Read Isaiah 58:1-12 and Matthew 25:31-40. How do these texts relate to each other? How do they relate to you?
2. Read this week's articles titled *How?* What are some of your most important relationships? Describe the effort that it takes to maintain one of your relationships. What makes the relationship worth your time and effort? What can you do this week to work on your relationship with Christ?
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.

“Feed Flint”



“Feed Flint”



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.

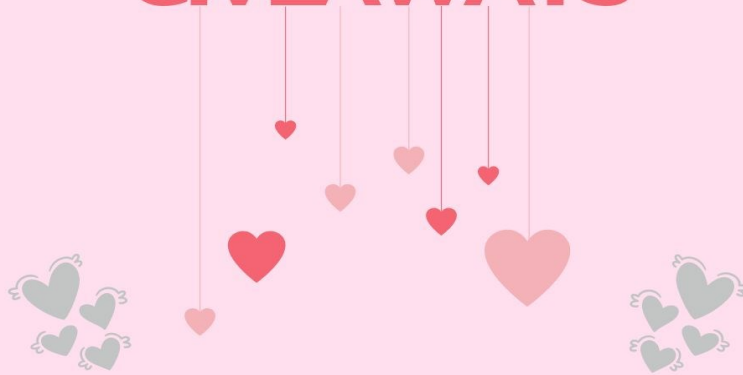
Our Sizzling Culture program provides jobs and new skills to our city's youth. This includes year-round employment. Our staff and most of our volunteers come from the neighborhoods we support. We call this sustainable abundance because families move from need-based on scarcity to enough based on community-generated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

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

Too often our struggles with doubt are hidden, pushed into the back of the cupboard like a corrosive agent that is too dangerous to touch. With clarity, warmth, and candor, Barnabas Piper shows us that doubt does not have to be something that corrodes, but rather in its right place can be something that strengthens faith. -Mark Sayers (07/01/2015).

Barnabas Piper is a pastor, author, podcaster, and speaker who lives near Nashville, Tennessee, with his family. He writes regularly for *He Reads Truth* and blogs at BarnabasPiper.com. Rev Piper has authored several books and Bible studies. In addition, he co-hosts *The Happy Rant* podcast, a popular show discussing issues of faith and culture in a light-hearted, humorous manner.

I invite you to join us each Sunday for worship as we explore belief, faith, doubt, and unbelief. We will dig deeper into these subjects each Wednesday as we read Piper's book together.

If you prefer to avoid groups or live too far away, I encourage you to join us via Zoom 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 and are 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 — FlintAsbury.org.

Pastor Tommy

The Wonder of Christmas. An Advent worship series written and produced by © Skit Guys, 2022. Used with Permission.

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3PM-5PM**

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Look for the big banner
that says “SALE” ...

I'm not saying this is how it happened. I'm just saying that this may have occurred for Abraham because I wonder if this is how it happened to my family. My parents chose to leave their home in Arkansas for a better life. My dad shared with me that they concluded there was no way for them to support a family as sharecroppers. But Memphis was unproven potential and eventually we moved to Ohio. Did they follow God's guidance or hope that God would be with them regardless?

And most important, this is how God's directions work for me. In my experience, I'm left to determine which of the numerous voices in my head represents God. So instead of crystal clarity, I see the way toward a better future through blurred vision. And when I choose to do what I argue God led me to do, I do so based on my faith in God and my own, often flawed, ability to interpret God's will for me and the people affected.

And everyone is affected by our choices.

In another Abraham story, we read that God speaks to Abraham in the presence of three strangers he welcomed into his home. First, the men tell Abraham that Sarah will have a child despite her age. Later, as Abraham is walking with them, God tells Abraham about two cities where the people are collectively bad news. And God is considering an intervention that won't end well for anyone living there.

After the men left, Abraham continued his conversation with God. "What if there are 50 people who aren't like the rest? What if there are 50 who, instead of going along with the crowd, try to do good?" God responds, "If there are 50 good people then the city will be spared". Whew!

"Okay, but 50 is a lot to expect. What about 45?" "Sure, why not. If there are 45 innocent people, then everyone is spared." Abraham kept up the negotiation in the form of questions until he got the number down to ten. Indeed, there must be at least ten innocent persons even in the worst city.

This story is fascinating. Did the writer really intend for us to believe that this exchange took place between God and Abraham to illustrate how conversations with God play out? It's possible. But this isn't how it has worked for me. Instead, I have debates within my own head. And if there are any audible words, they come from me. Nevertheless, I'm willing to conclude that God participates with us in similar conversations. The challenge is to figure out when it's God's voice you're hearing.

What do you believe?

Jesus tells us that belief is a divine gift whereby we're assured by the Holy Spirit of God's presence in Him. I believe this to

be true. On my better days, I feel confident that God guides me. But honestly, when problems are piling up, I wonder and worry. Was this really God's idea or my own?

In those times, I believe that God's Spirit brings assurance. Perhaps not the certainty that my choices align with God's will for me because I suspect they're often not. Instead, I feel assured that God is with me, even after I make not-so-good choices. And while God allows me to suffer the consequences, He is with me always, even to the end of time.

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Martin G. Moore. "How to Make Great Decisions, Quickly." © Harvard Business Review, March 22, 2022. Retrieved from: [link](#)

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More Details@ [facebook.com/AsburyFarmsFlint](https://www.facebook.com/AsburyFarmsFlint) events