



MAY 2025

**Worship Service in our Sanctuary at 10:30am
or watch our worship service LIVE! at:
www.fpcpunta.org and click on the logo "YouTube"**

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Punta Gorda, FL 33950
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www.fpcpunta.org



Pets

As many of you know, last month Bo and I lost our beloved beagle, Lyla. We have had her for 12 ½ incredible years, and the pain of her loss was also incredibly hard and unexpected. As a Children's Pastor, from time to time I would get the question, "Is my dog/cat/hamster/bird/rabbit in heaven?" Many times, my answer was simple, "God says in heaven there are no tears or pain, so if Duke makes you happy, I bet he will be there with you in heaven." It didn't seem right to just say, "Well, the Bible is silent on the issue, so who knows?"

As an adult who has lost a beloved pet, I hear my inner child asking the same question. Maybe as a parent, or as a grandparent you are asked that question as well. What will you say? I turn to the Lord and His Word, and there are two Scriptures that give me comfort:

Psalm 34:18 *The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*

Psalm 36:6 *Your righteousness is like the highest mountains, your justice like the great deep. You, Lord, preserve both people and animals.*

In the days and weeks that have followed Lyla's passing, we have been truly brokenhearted and crushed. It caught us by surprise just how much of our life was so intertwined with Lyla. From chores around the house, to going to Working Cow for an ice cream & a Pup Cup on a Saturday afternoon. And now silence. Brokenhearted and crushed. Yet, the Lord *preserves* both people and animals. That's hope in the midst of pain.

A few lessons that I have learned as I reflect on Lyla's passing and God's love and care for us:

1. Care – "Does God even know about our pets? Does he care? ... remember how the book of Jonah ends: "And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle" (Jonah 4:11). God took pity not only on the 120,000 people, but on their livestock too. And Jesus said this about our feathered friends: "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them" (Matt. 6:26). Surely the God who is love (1 John 4:8, 16) has affection for the 18,000 bird species in the world today. Surely the fact that he feeds them all in their wondrous beauty and complexity, diversity, and utility tells us something of their value. Scripture also teaches this: "Whoever is righteous has regard for the life of his beast" (Prov. 12:10). Cruelty to animals and godliness are antithetical." (Robert Yarbough) God cared for Lyla, and that should propel me to care for His creation and give me comfort.
2. Thankfulness – I read the Scripture - Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father... (James 1:17) Lyla was a gift to our family. In a weak moment, Bo said "yes" to a dog. No sooner were the words out of her mouth, than Maddie and I were out the door. We had already been looking and had found a breeder of beagles. Maddie picked Lyla, a cute roly-poly beagle puppy – actually the runt of the litter – but that made her all the more special. Over 12 ½ years she has lived with us through the ups and downs of life – never judging just supportive and loving. Great memories! A gift, that now even in grief, I look to God – the gift giver - and thank Him for bringing that gift of a little dog into our lives.

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WORSHIP MINISTRY



*Worship
Schedule*

*Sunday Mornings - 10:30am Worship Service (Also Online)
Sunday Evenings - 6:00pm Prayer Meeting (On Facebook)*



Fellowship Time

*Join us for beverages, cookies and treats
after Sunday's Worship Service*

Pets - continued from Page 1

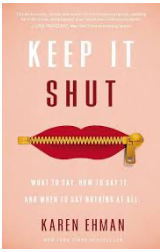
3. Hope – Death is that reminder that things are not the way they are supposed to be. The pain forces us to think there must be something better. In Ecclesiastes 3:11, we read, "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart..." So, what's better? We were created to be in relationships, and especially to have a relationship with God for all eternity, and sin fouled all that up. Yet God in His love and mercy provides a way to restore that relationship with Him – through His Son Jesus. I think that in God's grace He also provides the relationship of pets to help, when things are rough, or we just need a friend. Robert Yarbough writes, "A beloved dog walks with us through the wars that assail us. They can remind us by their example that maxim so familiar as to be forgettable: "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15). A good dog senses your heart and shares something of what's there. You may shun people when you are steamrolled by grief, but you will hug your dog." Lyla's passing reminds me that things are not as they should be, but God's love is in the process of redeeming all of creation- and that is hopeful because it is based on His character and promises. A relationship with Him, others, and even pets are a gift of His grace. Getting back to the way things ought to be.

So, is Lyla in heaven? I still don't know, and as a theologian I can't give you a definitive answer. I know from His Word that He cares and loves us, and we see clues that He cares and loves His creation, which includes our animals. And I am thankful to the giver of all good gifts that He brought Lyla into our family. So, I know that God draws close in times of grief, and look forward to the day I enter glory, and expect to see Lyla at the Pearly Gates. But if not, I know there will be no more grief, no more tears or pain, because I will be in the presence of my loving Saviour – Jesus Christ – and that is what matters most. (Still, I can't help but dream of sharing another Pup Cup in heaven with Lyla!)

In Christ, Pastor Barksdale



DISCIPLESHIP 2025



WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY

May 6th and 20th

We meet on the first and third Tuesdays of each month at 10:00am in Fellowship Hall

May 6th - Session 1 - "Sparks, Squabbles, Spats, and Such: Our Words Matter"

May 20th - Session 2 - "On Filling Gaps and Zipping Lips: Listen to Others, Talk to God"

Call Kathy Belville at 508-733-0546 for more information - All are welcome!



DONUTS & DOCTRINE BIBLE STUDY

**May 7th, 14th, 21st
Wednesdays at 10:00am**

JONAH

All are welcome!

DISCIPLESHIP WISDOM

The Missing Piece to a Deeper Walk with God - By Nik Harrang

"If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail."— A. Maslow

For me as a young Christian, it seemed to be common knowledge that if you wanted to experience a deeper walk with God, it was pretty obvious what you needed to do: Read your Bible and Pray more! And, of course, you should attend church, show up at special meetings, and ideally serve somewhere.

If I was struggling with a problem, the answer for many years was some version of "try harder," and I would redouble my efforts at the fundamentals of the faith.

Now, truth be told, there is a lot of help, stability, and strength to be found in a life that is anchored in these basics of the faith. There really is no substitute for feeding on God's Word (Jesus did describe it as our 'daily bread' after all). And a consistent prayer life is a cure for a thousand ills.

Service, fellowship, worship, and the other biblical practices are indeed essential for a healthy relationship with God. Trying to live the Christian life without these in place is a bit like trying to raft a Class IV river without a paddle: It can be done, but I wouldn't recommend it!

But what do you do when all of these things are in place and you still struggle? What can be done when we feel stuck, stalled, or dissatisfied in our walk with God?

This is where the holistic model of Deeper Walk was such an 'aha' moment for me.

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My boss, Marcus Warner, has a knack for simplifying complex things. Several years ago, Marcus came up with [the FISH Model](#) as a paradigm for understanding four essential elements for a deeper walk with God.* These four essentials can be remembered like this:

- **Freedom** – experiencing greater freedom from things that keep us in bondage
- **Identity in Christ** – both my ‘covenant’ identity and living from the unique heart Jesus gave me
- **Spirit** – learning how to walk in the Spirit and how to think scripturally
- **Heart-Focused Community** – growing with others who are on the journey together

FISH should lead to **Mission** (or ‘Go Fish’) where we are partnering with Jesus and fellow believers to share the Good News and help others grow in Freedom, Identity, Spirit, and Heart-Focused Community.

While the FISH model doesn’t explain everything about the Christian life, it does provide a simple, holistic model that any Christian, Small Group, or Church family can use to examine what may be missing in their current walk with God.

Here is a set of questions that could be helpful in diagnosing what may be missing in your walk with God:

- **Freedom** – Am I living in bondage to bad habits, unhealed wounds, or lies about myself or God? If so, freedom ministry can be an incredible help here. ‘REAL Prayer’ to bring healing to wounds and spiritual warfare ministry to deal with demonic influence can make a night and day difference in a person’s life!
- **Identity** – Am I truly living from a place of victory in Christ? Is my sense of identity grounded in my being a son or daughter of God, righteous in His eyes, holy and dearly loved? And am I growing in my relational skills and personal maturity to where I more and more ‘act like myself’ no matter what difficult circumstances I find myself in?
- **Spirit** – Am I learning to abide in Christ more functionally throughout the day? Is ‘listening prayer’ becoming more a part of my rhythm of life? Am I experiencing God’s Word as daily bread that I sense is nourishing my soul?
- **Heart-Focused Community** – Am I cultivating relationships and rhythms in my life where I am interfacing with other like-minded believers on a regular basis?
- **Mission** – Am I aware of the opportunities God is placing before me to be His witness in both word and deed to help others find and follow Jesus Christ?

Life is a journey. For perfectionists like me, I tend to want to find all the areas where I am falling short and work hard to shore them up as quickly as possible.

Yet this is not how God works. We are all works in progress. And as the Good Shepherd, He wants to lead us one step at a time into a progressively deeper walk with Himself.

So the next time you feel like you are stuck, or that something is missing in your walk with God, why not take a moment to use the FISH model and ask God what your next step is to go deeper. I suggest you try something like this:

- Find a quiet place. Set aside 15-30 minutes to be alone with God.
- Spend time in a joyful memory. For the first few minutes, think about a joyful memory – a special time when you felt joyful, peaceful, and connected to God and/or someone you love.
- Share gratitude with God. After a few minutes spent enjoying that memory, write down a prayer of gratitude to God.
- Inquire of the Lord: “Lord, how are you inviting me to go deeper in my walk with You at this time?”
- Wait on the Lord. You may wish to write the thoughts that come to mind from God’s perspective.** Or God may use an image or other means to impress upon your heart what He wants you to know.
- Test it. Does what you sensed line up with God’s Word, God’s character (cf. the fruit of the Spirit, Gal. 5:22-23), and bring God’s peace (cf. Col. 3:15)?
- Share with a friend. Sharing with others what God has shown us builds community, brings encouragement, and is a safeguard.

I’ll be honest. I have no idea what may be missing in your walk with God at this time (if anything). But I do know that the answer to a deeper walk is definitely not “try harder.”

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Rather than trying harder to do the right thing to grow closer to God, *why not ask Him how He is at work in your life and how He is inviting you to grow closer to Him?*

The answer may be found in the FISH model or in something else He shows you.

Either way, the Good Shepherd promises to lead us as we seek Him.

So why not pull out your calendar now and set a 30 minute “date with God” to inquire how you can go deeper?

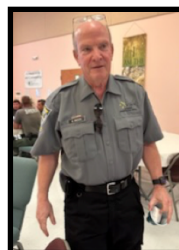
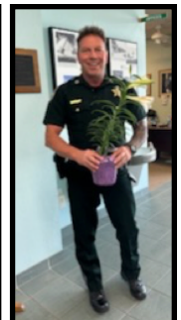
You may just discover a missing piece to experiencing a deeper walk!

* The Fish Model is explained in depth in “A Deeper Walk: A Proven Path For Developing a More Vibrant Faith” by Marcus Warner.

** To learn more about listening prayer, see “Joyful Journey: Listening to Immanuel” by Jim Wilder, et al., or check out the “Listening Prayer Online Conference” available in our “Learning Library-Premium”.

Burgers For Badges Attendance April 21, 2025

Sheriff's Dept. - 29
Fire Dept. - 41
Our Church - 18
Total - 88



MISSIONS MINISTRY



First Presbyterian Church proudly supports
Missions from our church budget.
If you would personally like to make additional
donations, please make checks payable to FPC
and indicate the mission on the memo line.



STAND IN THE GAP FUND

*The purpose of this fund is to assist supported missionaries and ministries
of our church when they face unexpected financial burdens*

To donate to this fund, please mark your gift as SITG

Monthly Mission Support

Crossroads
HOPE
Academy



CROSSROADS HOPE ACADEMY (PUNTA GORDA, FLORIDA)

Crossroadspg.org



JESUS LOVES YOU MINISTRY (PORT CHARLOTTE, FLORIDA)

Jesuslovesyouministryinc.com

**Shower & Lunch
Ministry**

**GROUND UP
MINISTRIES**

GROUND UP MINISTRIES (CAPE CORAL, FLORIDA)

groundupministries.org



MISIÓN PENIEL (IMMOKALEE, FLORIDA)

Misionpeniel.com

ANTIOCH PARTNERS MISSIONARIES



Eric and Debbie Stone, Guatemala

Lisa Alfonsi, Lima, Peru

theantiochpartners.org



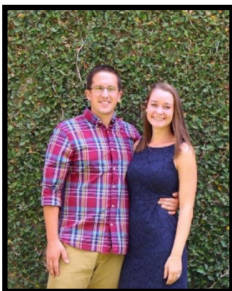
MISSIONARY VENTURES INTERNATIONAL

Chasen and Katie Brokaw

Nicaragua

mvi.org

breakingborders.org



FPC ACTIVITIES AND OUTREACH



PRAYER SHAWL GATHERING

We will resume in November

Thank you to all who participated this last season. Susie Lorenz



GAME FELLOWSHIP

Thursday mornings at 10:00am in Fellowship Hall All are welcome!



LADIES LUNCH BUNCH

1st and 3rd Friday of each month

Sign up in the church foyer

Friday, May 2nd

11:30am

Captain's Table

Punta Gorda

Friday, May 16th

11:30am

Riviera Restaurant

Punta Gorda



PULLEN UP A CHAIR

Barksdale and Bo will host get-together dinners for groups of eight at their home

Wednesday, May 7th at 5:00pm

Sign up in the church foyer or call/email the church office

There is no agenda, lesson, or study, just a time to get together for fellowship



MOTHER'S DAY BRUNCH

Sunday, May 11th at 9:15am

Fellowship Hall

Sign up in the church foyer



MISIÓN PENIEL (IMMOKALEE, FLORIDA)

Join us on Friday, May 30th for the morning session

We will meet at the church at 9:00am

We need 6 people to sign up in the church foyer

LIVING CROSS



MEMBER CARE



Prayer Requests and Hospital / Rehab Information
Address, Phone, Email changes
Birthdays and Anniversaries
Email to first@fpcpunta.org



First Pres is on Facebook!

Go to:

facebook.com/FirstPresbyterianChurch-Punta Gorda



To watch the current Service:

- 1) Follow the link: <https://www.youtube.com/@FPCPG>
(This link is also on our website in the top right corner, simply press the YouTube button.)
- 2) When you land on the FPC YouTube page you will see a small screen with the word LIVE, click it and it will fill up your screen.
The Service will begin at approximately 10:30am (Pre-Service at 10:15am).
(If you don't see a small screen with the word LIVE, we have not started streaming.)



Giving to FPC - In person
Mail to the church office: 25250 Airport Rd; PG, FL 33950
Online Giving through our website: fpcpunta.org, click Donate

MILITARY PRAYER LIST

Prayer

O Prince of Peace, we humbly ask Your protection for all our men and women in military service. Give them unflinching courage to defend with honor, dignity and devotion the rights of all who are imperiled by injustice and evil. Guard our churches, our homes, our schools, our hospitals, our factories, our buildings, and all those within from harm and peril. Protect our land and its people from enemies within and without. Grant an early peace with victory founded upon justice. Instill in the hearts and minds of men and women everywhere a firm purpose to live forever in peace and good will towards all. Amen.

- * Major John McPherson, Air Force, great nephew of Marguerite O'Brien, stationed at Sheppard Air Force Base in Wichita Falls, Texas
- * Major Ryan Swisher, Army Ranger, grandson of Rachel Pfaender, stationed in North Carolina
- * Major Eric Engstrom, Army Intel., son of Alan Engstrom, stationed at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
- * Lt. Col. David Sifferd, Jr., Army Reserve, son of David Sifferd, stationed in Ft. Knox, KY
- * Pvt. Michael Robert Wagner, U.S. Marine Corp., great-grandson of Robert and Jean Humphreys, stationed in Hawaii
- * Second Lieutenant, JTAC, Alexander Kingsbury, Air Force, great-grandson of Tim Ronan, stationed in New York
- * Major Christina West, Army, granddaughter of William Dossé, stationed at Fort Liberty (formerly Fort Bragg, NC) and her husband Major Matt Walter, Army, currently deployed in the Middle East

Do you have a family member serving in the military?
If so, we'd like to add them to the newsletter prayer list. Fill out the form that's on the sign-up table in the church foyer and place it in the HELMET or let the church office know.

MAY 2025

CHURCH PRAYER CALENDAR AND CELEBRATIONS

Prayer is the place where burdens change shoulders - We pray for....
*The elderly, the infirm, the hospitalized, those in nursing homes, the homebound and lonely,
 and all those who have requested our prayerful support.*

Each month we remember church members and friends on a rotating basis...



1	Jene Shafer	11	Sharon Weed	21	Rick & Kay Berner
2	Dave & Sharon Sifferd	12	Donald & Susan Willecke	22	Duane & Wanda Boyles
3	Ron & Billie Sixt	13	Charles & Evelyn Zietsma	23	Lili Bush
4	Andy & Nancy Smith	14	George Albright	24	Ray & Joan Byron
5	Margie Smith	15	Jay Aldridge	25	Bonnie Carey
6	Bo & Karen Sostar	16	Rex Anderson	26	Sam & Patti Cessna
7	Gail Thornton	17	Laurel Aumend	27	Judith Cornnell
8	Larrie & Marjorie Tisdale	18	Denny & Minty Ausman	28	Robert Cuzner
9	Richard & Linda Wagar	19	Roy & Kathy Belville	29	Peter & Donna DeBree
10	Don & Mary Anne Washabaugh	20	Shirley Berg	30	Bill Dosse
				31	Ramona Douglas



MAY BIRTHDAYS

4—Connie Luther	15—Rex Anderson
6—Shirley Berg	17—Jay Aldridge
11—Art Koon	17—Denny Ausman
12—Bonnie Carey	19—Robert Cuzner
12—Gail Evans	20—Richard Wagar
14—Duane Boyles	24—Joan Hoffman
	28—Lili Bush



MAY ANNIVERSARIES

2—George & Beverly Fallenbeck	10 yrs.
2—Gene & Barbara McPherson	10 yrs.
3—Duane & Wanda Boyles	56 yrs.
6—Al & Susie Lorenz	53 yrs.
27—Rick & Kay Berner	58 yrs.



MAY 2025



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<div>Church Office Hours Monday - Thursday 9:00am to 1:00pm</div>				1 10:00am Game Fellowship	2 11:30am Ladies Lunch Bunch at Captain's Table in PG	3
4 Communion Sunday 10:30am Worship Service 11:30am Fellowship Time 6:00pm Prayer Meeting-FB	5 1:00pm Worship Team	6 10:00am Women's Bible Study 1:00pm Fellowship Team	7 10:00am Donuts & Doctrine 10:00am Jesus Loves You Shower Ministry	8 10:00am Game Fellowship	9	10
11 Mother's Day 9:15am Brunch 10:30am Worship Service 11:30am Fellowship Time 6:00pm Prayer Meeting-FB	12	13 10:00am Mission Team	14 10:00am Donuts & Doctrine 10:00am Jesus Loves You Shower Ministry	15 10:00am Game Fellowship	16 11:30am Ladies Lunch Bunch at Riviera in PG	17
18 Deacon's Fund 10:30am Worship Service 11:30am Fellowship Time 6:00pm Prayer Meeting-FB	19 1:00pm Session	20 10:00am Women's Bible Study	21 10:00am Donuts & Doctrine 10:00am Jesus Loves You Shower Ministry	22	23	24
25 10:15am Hymn Sing 10:30am Worship Service 11:30am Fellowship Time 6:00pm Prayer Meeting-FB	26 MEMORIAL DAY OFFICE CLOSED	27	28 10:00am Jesus Loves You Shower Ministry	29 10:00am Game Fellowship	30 9:00am Mission Trip to Immokalee	31