

PFBC NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY

2024

MISSION FOCUS

Bill & Lisa Clark ~ The Navigators



Lisa & Bill Clark
(December 2023)

Dear brothers and sisters at Park Forest Baptist,

We are deeply grateful for your many years of support, prayer, and practical expressions of love and encouragement. We value your partnership in the Gospel! In line with the calling of The Navigators, Lisa and I are seeking,

“To advance the Gospel of Jesus and His Kingdom into the nations through spiritual generations of laborers living and discipling among the lost.”

In our specific context in Bulgaria, we are engaging with students and other young people with the intention of communicating the Gospel both by word and by striving to live a Christ-centered life openly among the lost. I am an adjunct (part-time) professor at the American University in Bulgaria (AUBG) which provides us with a natural platform for connecting with students, faculty, administrators, and staff. An important element of our outreach is to initiate and foster a sense of community among the students/faculty who identify as followers of Jesus. (Active Christians account for somewhere around 1 or 2 percent of the population in Bulgaria.) Lisa and I host a weekly meeting in our home open to believers on campus. Most weeks there are between 6 and 12 of us who gather for a time of fellowship, worship, instruction in the Word, and prayer.

Additionally, Lisa and I meet one-on-one with students and some young couples in town. We are seeking to both motivate and equip believers for a lifetime of walking with the Lord and serving Him. We want to help the believing students to grow in their desire and effectiveness in walking with the Lord and sharing the Goodnews with their fellow students.

The students/faculty we serve are not only from Bulgaria. We've enjoyed the international diversity the campus provides. This year our Sunday gatherings have included believers from Bulgaria, Canada, the USA, Bangladesh, Kazakhstan, Russia, Ukraine, Papua New Guinea, and the UK. Our hope is that when they leave AUBG they will continue to shine for Jesus in whatever place the Lord leads them.



Lisa & Bill Clark
Egypt (January 2024)

We value your prayers.

- We are approaching retirement, we are committed to continuing to minister until the Lord calls us home, but we realize we may have only a few more years in Bulgaria. Please pray that we would have wisdom and discern the Lord's leading in terms of when it's time to return to the US. Also, please pray that, long or short, we will finish well.
- We've seen an increase impact of secularization among the students in general, and of apathy/nominalism among the believers. Please pray for a renewed zeal to know and grow in Jesus, both in us and in those we seek to influence.
- I (Bill) am teaching a philosophy class in Religion & Science (in addition to the Biology and Environmental Science classes he teaches) this semester. This class offers opportunities to more openly present Christ to students who have never thought much about faith before. Please pray the Lord will use in class discussions to spark an interest in the heart of the students to pursue learning more about the Faith.
- Our older son, Jesse, who lives in State College has been struggling with mental health and spiritual issues for many years. He is not walking with the Lord. Please pray that the Lord would intervene decisively in his life and that Lisa and I would have wisdom to know how best to help him.
- I (Bill) recently passed the two-year mark since is brain surgery to remove a tumor. I am doing well. We praise God for the health and strength he has given us over the years. However, we are feeling the effects of aging - minor aches and pains and less capacity than when we began full-time ministry over 40 years ago. Our prayer is that we will continue to grow in our love and faith as we keep our eyes on Jesus, and that we will have continued opportunities to invest in the next generation of laborers.

PASTOR'S NOTES

Pastor Jeremy

Strong Marriages



Whose idea was marriage? God's. So, he knows how to help us build strong marriages. I remember when Hilary and I got married 25 years ago. I had visions of everything being perfect. What a rude awakening I was in for, not because of her, but because of me, because I was far from perfect. God had to teach me a lot about marriage, and he still is. He has taught me that marriage is far more about Him, his glory and him making me more into the image of Christ. When I learned that, then I began to learn how to have true joy in my marriage and how to love my wife. I'm still learning, but I am thankful that as we approach 25 years this November, we love each other more than we did when we said 'I do' and God continues to do his work in us.

This year PFBC would like to take small steps in helping to continue to strengthen marriages. On February 9th we are hosting an event called the 'Be My Valentine' Dinner Party and whether you are married or dating and desire a Christ focused relationship, you are invited to come (register here by February 5th). We are planning a great night of food cooked by Penn State Chef and our own, Nate Dealy, and lots of fun and encouragement in your relationship. I encourage you to attend. We are praying that God will bless you and strengthen your love for one another that night.

In addition, here is a piece of an article that has some great insights and practical tips on how to continue to build a strong marriage founded on Christ. This is from Focus on the Family and some insights from author Gary Thomas, author of the book, "Sacred Marriage." Full link below.

God's Design For Marriage

What if your relationship isn't as much about you and your spouse as it is about you and God?

Instead of asking why we have struggles in the first place, the more important issue is how we deal with them.

In Sacred Marriage, Thomas has not written your typical "how to have a happier relationship" book. Rather, he asks: How can we use the challenges, joys, struggles and celebrations of marriage to draw closer to God? What if God designed marriage to make us both happy and holy?

Viewing Marriage Realistically

"We have to stop asking of marriage what God never designed it to give — perfect happiness, conflict-free living, and idolatrous obsession," Thomas explains.

Instead, he says, we can appreciate what God designed marriage to provide: partnership, spiritual intimacy and the ability to pursue God — together. So, what does Thomas think is the most common misconception Christians have about marriage?

"Finding a 'soul mate' — someone who will complete us," he says. "The problem with looking to another human to complete us is that, spiritually speaking, it's idolatry. We are to find our fulfillment and purpose in God. . . . If we expect our spouse to be 'God' to us, he or she will fail every day. No person can live up to such expectations."

Everyone has bad days, yells at his or her spouse or is downright selfish. Despite these imperfections, God created the husband and wife to steer each other in His direction.

Thomas offers an example: "When my wife forgives me . . . and accepts me, I learn to receive God's forgiveness and acceptance as well. In that moment, she is modeling God to me, revealing God's mercy to me, and helping me to see with my own eyes a very real spiritual reality."

God's Design for Marriage Is an Other-Centered Union

It's easy to see why God designed an other-centered union for a me-centered world. Living that way is a challenge when bills pile up, communication breaks down and you're just plain irritated with your husband or wife. For those days, Thomas offers these reminders to help ease the tension:

God created marriage as a loyal partnership between one man and one woman.

Marriage is the firmest foundation for building a family.

God designed sexual expression to help married couples build intimacy.

Marriage mirrors God's covenant relationship with His people.

We see this last parallel throughout the Bible. For instance, Jesus refers to himself as the "bridegroom" and to the kingdom of heaven as a "wedding banquet."

These points demonstrate that God's purposes for marriage extend far beyond personal happiness. Thomas is quick to clarify that God isn't against happiness per se, but that marriage promotes even higher values.

"God did not create marriage just to give us a pleasant means of repopulating the world and providing a steady societal institution to raise children. Further, He planted marriage among humans as yet another signpost pointing to His own eternal, spiritual existence."

Serving Your Spouse

He spends the entire evening at the office — again. She spends money without entering it in the checkbook. He goes golfing instead of spending time with the kids. From irritating habits to weighty issues that seem impossible to resolve, loving one's spouse through the tough times isn't easy. But the same struggles that drive us apart also shed light on what we value in marriage.

"If happiness is our primary goal, we'll get a divorce as soon as happiness seems to wane," Thomas says. "If receiving love is our primary goal, we'll dump our spouse as soon as they seem to be less attentive. But if we marry for the glory of God, to model His love and commitment to our children, and to reveal His witness to the world, divorce makes no sense."

Couples who've survived a potentially marriage-ending situation, such as infidelity or a life-threatening disease, may continue to battle years of built-up resentment, anger or bitterness. So, what are some ways to strengthen a floundering relationship — or even encourage a healthy one? Thomas offers these practical tips:

- Focus on your spouse's strengths rather than their weaknesses.
- Encourage rather than criticize.
- Pray for your spouse instead of gossiping about them.
- Learn and live what Christ teaches about relating to and loving others.

Young couples in particular can benefit from this advice. After all, many newlyweds aren't adequately prepared to make the transition from seeing one another several times a week to suddenly sharing everything. Odds are, annoying habits and less-than-appealing behaviors will surface. Yet as Christians, we are called to respect everyone — including our spouse.

Marriages Need God's Grace and Mercy

Thomas adds, "The image I use in Sacred Marriage is that we need to learn how to 'fall forward.' That is, when we are frustrated or angry, instead of pulling back, we must still pursue our partner under God's mercy and grace."

Lastly, Thomas suggests praying this helpful prayer: Lord, how can I love my spouse today like (s)he's never been loved and never will be loved?

"I can't tell you how many times God has given me very practical advice — from taking over some driving trips to doing a few loads of laundry," Thomas says. It's one prayer that I find gets answered just about every time."

While other marriage books may leave us feeling overwhelmed, spotlighting our shortcomings and providing pages of "relationship homework," Sacred Marriage makes it clear that any couple can have a successful, happy and holy marriage.

With a Christ-centered relationship, an other-centered attitude and an unwavering commitment to making it work, your marriage can flourish — you can experience God's design for marriage.

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/gods-design-for-marriage/>

Be My Valentine

Dinner Party

Friday Night

February 9th

6:30PM @ PFBC

\$60 per couple

Attire: Semi-Casual

Childcare Available at no cost

Scan QR Code for Reservations
or contact the Office
RSVP by February 5th



Join us for a wonderful night out this year with your Valentine as we enjoy some great food you'll love prepared by Penn State Chef Nate Dealy. In addition you'll strengthen your love with your spouse or dating relationship through one of the well known Prepare-Enrich relationship building tools.

Prepare-Enrich has been strengthening relationships for over 30 years through its counseling programs, Pastor Jeremy as a certified PE counselor, will guide us through one of the fun activities that helps strengthen and improve relationships also while encouraging couples through God's Word.

PFBC KIDS

Babette Manning

February is here and we are inching closer to Spring.



Indoor Park Valentine's Party

will be held on Tuesday, February 13th. Snacks, crafts and more fun for everyone.



We are having a clothing/book/toy swap in February during Indoor Park.

Families are able to bring items that their kids have outgrown and take items that their kids can use. Anything left at the end of the swap is taken to GoodWill.



February Craft: Heart Bouquet

- Supplies Needed:
- Red and Pink Cardstock
 - Tissue Paper
 - Glitter
 - Buttons
 - Sequins
 - Green Pipe Cleaners

February Bible Reading: We will continue reading through Proverbs

Proverbs	Proverbs
11 _____	15 _____
_____	_____
12 _____	16 _____
_____	_____
13 _____	17 _____
_____	_____
14 _____	18 _____
_____	_____

- Make hearts from red and pink paper, trace heart cookie cutters or fold paper in heart to make heart.
- Decorate with a variety of glitter, sequins, buttons, etc.
- Add the green pipe cleaner for the stem
- Put your heart flowers in a jar or vase to display or give to someone.

Jenna's

Jokes



1.) WHAT HAPPENED WHEN THE WORLD'S TONGUE-TWISTER CHAMPION GOT ARRESTED?

2.) WHAT DO YOU CALL AN ILLEGALLY PARKED FROG?

3.) WHY DID THE ACTOR FALL THROUGH THE FLOORBOARDS?



Answers: 1) They gave him a tough sentence! 2) Toad! 3) They were going through a stage!

YAM

Young Adult Ministry

Happy February! This month, we're just sticking to the facts. Fun Facts. About Groundhogs. And Valentines. Yep, that's it.

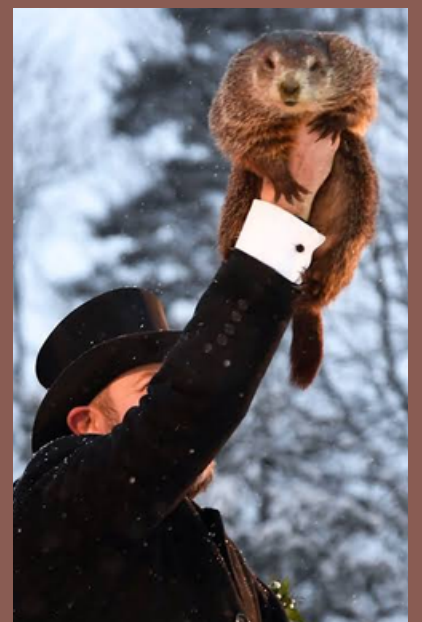
Happy Groundhog's Day!

The first official Groundhog's Day was on February 2, 1887 in Punxatawney, PA.

The ritual of a groundhog predicting the weather with its shadow is rooted in the customs of German immigrants who settled here in PA (and those customs have quite a history too).

Punxatawney Phil is superior to all other weather-predicting groundhogs (we're looking at you, Staten Island Chuck and Buckeye Chuck, among others. Disgraceful.)

Those snazzy guys at Gobbler's Knob wearing top hats and suits each year are known as the "Inner Circle"



Happy Valentine's Day!

The first Valentine letter was written by a man in prison.



Valentine's Day has some other interesting and at times dark history. That's vague, I know. I'm giving you the honor of the research.

Plan on calling someone you love that day? Great, you can thank Alexander Graham Bell. He applied for a patent for a telephone on February 14, 1876.



Richard Cadbury (yes, like Cadbury eggs) was the first to introduce a heart-shaped box of chocolates for Valentine's Day in 1861.



So, there you have it. February's Fun Facts: what you didn't know you needed to know.

MEN'S MINISTRY

Men's Breakfast:

Saturday, February 3rd at 8 AM.

Join us for bacon, eggs, pancakes, juice, and coffee.



WOMEN'S MINISTRY

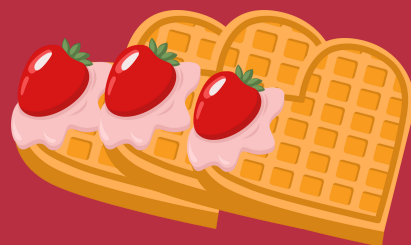
**Thursday Ladies Bible Study - Every Thursday at the church
- Studying Hebrews**

Contact Donna Schwenger (donnaschwenger@gmail.com)
or Estelle Clancy (estelleclancy@gmail.com) for more information



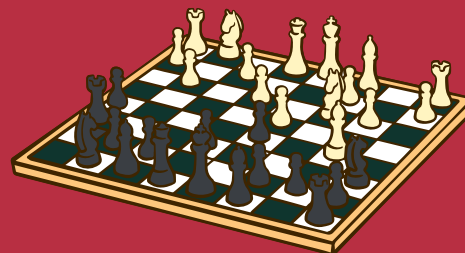
Mom's Lifegroup Gathering - Saturday, February 17 @ 9 AM.

Get together with other moms and enjoy coffee & breakfast items, while sharing about being a mom and being challenged by God's word.



Ladies Game Night - Friday, February 23 @ 6:30 PM.

Come out and bring a favorite game and snack for a fun night at Hilary Field's home.
Contact Hilary (hil2field@gmail.com)



Ladies Spring Retreat Registration Begins February 11th!

Our theme for retreat is Isaiah: Striving Less and Trusting God More (Melissa Spoelstra)

During the weekend, Melissa (through video) will guide us in trusting in God's Character, in His Comfort, and in His Commands. Melissa shares "we can say with my mouth, 'I trust God,' but my stress, worry, and lack of peace don't evidence that kind of faith. Then there are other times when we thought we put our trust in God, but the expectations we set for Him didn't materialize. Isaiah was human just like us, and yet he radically trusted God and called anyone who would listen to do the same. Through the study, we won't be striving harder, but instead trusting more deeply the Faithful One who is so worthy of our utter dependence."

Come and enjoy the retreat! – April 5-7, 2024, at Camp Hebron - \$155/per person
If you have questions or need financial assistance, see Hilary Field.

Registration is open from Feb. 11 – March 17, 2024!

Grab a retreat brochure at the retreat table in the church lobby.

Some highlights from past retreats are -

- Connection with other women
- Small group time
- Hearing God's Word
- Delicious food
- Fun activities
- Stopping to get ice cream
- Bonfire on a cool evening
- Worshipping in song
- Prayer time in the morning
- Hikes – outside activities



Ladies Spring Retreat at Camp Hebron

April 5 – 7, 2024

Retreat brochures will be out early 2024. Stay tuned for more details.



RIOT Report

Pastor Jon

Who am I?

We ask this question a lot. And depending on where we look for answers, we get a lot of different ways to identify ourselves. The world says look to your accomplishments, your job, your bank account, your social status, your possessions, and so much more. These things force us to put all the focus on ourselves and can cause us to become prideful and arrogant.

What we should do is look to God for our identity. When we do that, it takes the focus off of ourselves, and puts it on Jesus. That happens when we humble ourselves, and acknowledge who we are before Him. When we identify with God, we have a message of good news and hope to share. Identifying with God is something that we must choose to do for ourselves – we cannot rely on someone else’s identity in Christ. When we do that, we can influence others to do the same thing. When we identify with Jesus, our actions will prove that, and the people around us will be able to see it clearly. We are the children of God, and we need to live that out every day.

These truths were the focus of our lesson series in January. We challenged the teens to really look at who they are, and how they identify themselves. Our last lesson focused on Paul, who in Philippians 3 shows that he very easily could have identified in all his worldly accomplishments, but chose instead to identify with Christ. We encouraged the teens to examine their lives and recognize the things that are holding them back from being wholly committed to identifying with Jesus.

Please pray:

- We start a new series for February called “Marvel” on worship.
- That we can continue to build strong relationships with the teens.

