Bob: It was 46 years ago, this week, that Astronaut Frank Borman and the crew of Apollo 8 was circling the moon and saw, for the first time, the sun rising above.

[Previously Recorded]

Frank Borman: Now approaching a lunar sunrise. And the crew of Apollo 8 has a message that we would like to send to you: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters, and God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” And from the crew of Apollo 8, we close with: “Good night—a Merry Christmas—and God bless all of you—all of you on this good earth.”

[Studio]

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Monday, December 22nd. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®️, Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. We'll talk today to someone who is following in Frank Borman’s footsteps as he watches the sunrise from outer space every day. Stay tuned.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. This is going to be a little different program than we normally do because Dennis is not in the studio, but we do have him on the phone with us. Dennis, welcome to FamilyLife Today. Tell listeners where you are today.

Dennis: I am glad you're back at the command center, Bob, because I'm here at the nation's capital, Washington, DC, about to—in a few hours—speak to a number of congressional leaders and their spouses, talking to them about their marriages, and hopefully helping them make their marriages go the distance.

It’s not often you and I are actually doing a radio broadcast remote, like this, with one another—but this is even more unique because we have a radio listener—he and his wife listen to FamilyLife Today. This is the most unique location, I think—Bob, don’t you agree?—that we’ve ever done on FamilyLife Today in terms of hooking somebody into the broadcast?
Bob: We have a listener, who is joining us today from just outside of Kazakhstan, and he is preparing for a long—

Dennis: No, no, no, don’t tell them, Bob! [Laughter] Let him tell our listeners what he’s about to do. How often do you get a chance to talk to a radio listener?—it’s not often. We just get a chance to meet a few, but this one is a special guy. His name is Butch Wilmore. Butch, why don’t you, right off the bat here, just tell our listeners what you are about to go do.

Butch: That’s a very interesting question. First, let me say that it’s a pleasure to have the opportunity to share a little time and some thoughts with the two of you and with all of your listeners. Sometimes the Lord allows us to have the desires of our heart; and many years ago, after many years of prayer and trying, I was selected into the astronaut program.

Now, I have the opportunity to launch to the International Space Station from the steppes of Kazakhstan, near Baikonur. It’s where the Russian launch facility has been since the inception of their program. As a matter of fact, where Yuri Gagarin himself, the first human to leave the planet—it’s the same pad that he launched off of—the same pad I’ll be launching off of.

Bob: By the time our listeners hear this interview, if all goes as planned, you will be in command of the International Space Station; right?

Butch: Yes, sir. I take command when the current expedition ends and will carry that command through mid-March.

Dennis: You and your wife, Deanna, have two daughters. You guys do listen to our broadcast every day. When I saw the email that came in from you that you were excited just about going to outer space, but also wanted to go on a unique mission as you did so. You’re going to do something when you’re up there, and I want to make sure we talk about that before we’re done.

Before we do, though, just kind of back up and tell us how you met Deanna and how you guys got a start in your marriage.

Butch: I wish I had 30 minutes to share that whole story with you because it is truly the providence of our Lord how it transpired in the details. But just in brief, we went to the same college—didn’t know each other—and the Lord brought us together when I was going through test pilot training at Patuxent River, Maryland. The Lord had taken Deanna up to Baltimore—she was teaching school. Through a mutual friend—a long story—we got together. It was the best first date I’ve ever had, without question. It took a while, but she eventually admitted it was the best first date she’d had as well. [Laughter]
**Dennis:** That was how many years ago?

**Butch:** Well, it’s actually been over 20 years ago now. We dated just shy of a year before we actually married; and then, like I said, married December 8th in 1994.

**Bob:** Butch, your wife is right there with you; isn’t she?

**Butch:** Yes, she is. She’s actually sharing the phone with me, as I speak.

**Bob:** Well, Deanna, welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Where did Butch take you on that first date?

**Deanna:** Oh, we met—I was living in Baltimore; and he was stationed in Patuxent River, so we met in Annapolis. We met there at a restaurant and had a great time—and went walking around the Naval Academy there—so that was very nice. It was just very special—very special.

**Bob:** Did you think, after that first date: “He’s the kind of guy I’d like to marry”?

**Deanna:** [Laughing] You know, I really didn’t think I would ever see him again. He had such a busy schedule—that that was the first weekend he had off in six months. I thought that there was no way we would ever see each other again because of that. I pretty much sort of hung it up right there. [Laughter]

**Butch:** I will say that the one thing that made it a very special first date—one of the reasons why it was the best first date I ever had is because we talked about the Lord almost the entire date—and our views on life and our views on what we’d learned from God’s Word. That’s the thing that made it really special.

**Dennis:** So, I want to know how a future astronaut proposes to a young lady he’s madly in love with and asks her to grab his hand and walk off into the future on a mission like none other.

**Bob:** You couldn’t take her up in a rocket and propose there—could you do anything like that?

**Butch:** No, but, you know, the first several days that we had—including that night in Annapolis and several thereafter—probably the first five dates we had—for some reason, we got rained on / I mean, terribly rained on every single time. I mean—drenched every single time we’d get together. So, the relationship started off very well, and it was very special.

I wanted to start our marriage off the same. I thought that I would like to propose to her in the rain. So, I bought two raincoats and prayed for rain. It was a Sunday—she came to visit me in Patuxent River, and we went to church. It was the most beautiful sunny day you’ve ever seen! [Laughter] But as we drove home from church, I saw one cloud in
the far distance. By the time we got to my house, where we were going to prepare lunch, it was overcast. Within 15 minutes of being home, it was a downpour. I grabbed her—said: “I’ve got a gift for you. Here, put this rain jacket on,” and took her out into the rain and got on my knee and proposed. I think she’ll say she was shocked. Literally, I kid you not, within 30 minutes of the proposal, it was sunny again.

Bob: That is a great story. [Laughter]

Dennis: Wow! It really is. I want to know, what’s it like to go outside and look up in the sky and know that your husband is circling the earth several times a day? What’s that feel like?

Deanna: [Laughter] You know, it’s just fantastic / it’s amazing! It’s so funny to look up and think that he’s up there. It’s great / it’s neat, and we don’t worry. We know that he’s in the Lord’s hands, and it’s just fantastic.

Dennis: What do you say to your daughters if they express or when they express maybe some fears?

Butch: It’s funny that you say that. We had family worship two nights ago. We talked about something we’d never talked about in our family worship before because our daughters are seven and ten. We talked about death. We used Hebrews 9:27: “It is appointed to man once to die, but after this the judgment,” and sprang off from there.

We talked about death and how death can come at any time. We’re not guaranteed anything, and that’s why it’s important. I shared my testimony about when the Lord saved me. Of course, the girls asked their mommy: “Okay, Mommy, we never heard yours exactly. Tell us your testimony.” She shared it with them then, too.

It was a very, very special time when we talked about going on without the other—the possibility of that—and how we want them to proceed if the Lord were to take either one of us. We told them that life would indeed be different, but we’re within the will of our Lord and we want to trek down that path. “Certainly, there’ll be a period of grieving,” I shared with them; and they’ll come through that and through that all. I told them that my desire for them is that they glorify the Lord as He would have us do.

Dennis: Butch, I have a question for you. If you’ve listened to our broadcast as frequently as you have, you know there’s a question I like to ask men. In this case, I’m going to ask both of you this question. It’s my favorite question to ask any human being. It just pulls out some fantastic stories. I want both you and Deanna to answer this, and we’ll let you go first. Out of everything you’ve done, in all the world, what would you say is the most courageous thing you’ve ever done?

Butch: That’s a very interesting question. I think about some of the things that the Lord has allowed me to experience—the places He’s allowed me to go. I have literally flown all over the world, and seen many things, and experienced many things—but nothing
compares—when the Lord has already, through His Spirit convicted the heart of someone, and He’s on a few occasions drawn me to that individual. I’ve had the opportunity then to share the saving gospel with them and see Him transform a heart. Sometimes, it’s very difficult to open up because of the pressures that we have around us in the world today. I think that’s what comes to my mind first—is standing up, being bold when the Lord calls us to do so, and not shirking away from that responsibility.

Bob: I want to make sure our listeners understand what you just said. In all that you’ve done—as a pilot / as an astronaut—flying sorties in hostile territories and being up in outer space—sharing your faith and standing for your convictions requires a different kind of courage than flying off on a mission where you may be in harm’s way.

Butch: It certainly does.

Bob: Wow.

Dennis: I have to tell you this, Butch. I’ve probably asked over a thousand men and women that question. You are the first one to ever say that courage to share your faith was the most courageous thing. I just want to add this little bit of color to what Bob just said to our listening audience. He’s flown 21 missions in Desert Storm into hostile territory—so there had to be some white-knuckle times in some of those trips as well.

Okay, Deanna. It’s your turn. We’ve given you plenty of time to think about this question.

Deanna: [Laughter] Well, it’s funny because the first thing I thought of was when I witnessed to my sister. She claimed she’s saved and she knows the Lord, but yet her life wasn’t reflecting it. Just talking to her—it’s always so difficult to share with family. My mind went to that point when I talked to her. I had to summon up a lot of courage and talk to her about the Lord and about her life. So, that was it for me.

The second thing that popped into my mind was scuba diving! [Laughter] I was hyperventilating, and I couldn’t do it! [Laughter]

Bob: I had that same experience—the first time under, I’m going, “How can I breathe down here?!”

Dennis: I would expect that even a naval aviator would cause his wife to be stretched, from time to time. So, I’m not surprised at all.

Butch: Let me share with you. The Lord truly blessed me—in more ways than I can even begin to share with you all—with my wife—who she is, and what she means to me, and what she means to a faithful Christian witness as a wife. As far as—I can’t imagine someone—she doesn’t fear. She never has fear when I’m doing this or doing that because she completely has trust in the Lord.
He’s given her that peace that passes all understanding. I used to do the F-18 flight demo at air shows. There was one opportunity where it just turns out—usually the crowd is beyond a certain line and they’re not underneath where the airplanes are flying—but because this was in Canada, she was right below me. I’m 500 knots, upside down, 200 feet right over her head, and she was just calm the whole time—no big deal. [Laughter]

**Dennis:** That is unbelievable. Okay, Butch, I want you to share with our listeners—you’re on a mission, obviously. You have a mission that NASA has sent you on to go and be the commander of the space station, but you have a resource from FamilyLife that you’re really considering using with your audience while you’re in space for six months. Share with them what your vision is.

**Butch:** Well, I requested from one of your guys *Stepping Up®*. It’s living your life as a man the way that God would have you live it. I’d like to just ask the guys, when I’m there—maybe share some of those thoughts with them and maybe even share some of the video series with them. I hope to do that. Hopefully, your listeners can pray about that—that the Lord will give me that opportunity to share that, and take and use that as the Holy Spirit will take and use it.

**Bob:** If you’re able to have that small group there aboard the space station, when you land, we’re going to have to have you come over and share the story of how the small group went. Will you do that?

**Butch:** Yes, sir. I will certainly. I absolutely will—love to.

**Bob:** That would be great. We are recording this before you launch; but as our listeners are hearing it, it’s about to be Christmas. You’re going to be away from your family at Christmas. You’re away from your daughters for their birthday this year because you’re in space for six months. How have you prepared for those family times while Dad’s away?

**Butch:** Well, it’s funny you should mention that. We celebrated a birthday that’s not the birthday; but my oldest daughter will be 10 on her birthday, and we celebrated tonight. [Laughter] I just finished—it was pink cake with pink icing. [Laughter] So we had cake, and we had it all. Also, before I left the United States, we sort of celebrated all of our birthdays and had a little special kind of Christmas celebration, if you will—no tree or anything—but just because I won’t physically be here.

We’ve been preparing the girls and ourselves—it’s us as well—for many months about what’s coming up and the separation. I think they’re prepared—they’re ready for it. These certain types of things—like I said—the little birthday parties and stuff that we’re trying to do is nice for them as well.

**Bob:** And you are able to call home and even to Skype on occasion?
Butch: It’s like Skype, yes. NASA allows, at least, one video down-link per week with the family. There is also a certain type of phone that we have. As long as we have a certain bandwidth, within the electromagnetic spectrum, I can make a phone call. So, if anything comes up, Deanna can shoot me an email. I get it almost instantaneously, and almost immediately I could call her if necessary. That’s where technology has gotten us today, and it’s very nice to have.

Dennis: I was just wondering what the long-distance bill was going to be. [Laughter]

Butch: Thankfully, I don’t have to pay that. [Laughter]

Dennis: Okay, here’s my last question for you, Butch. All of us—I bet there’s not a listener, who’s listening to this right now, who hasn’t watched the space shuttle on the launch pad and watched that thing just rocket its way off the pad into outer space. You’re in the former Soviet Union. You’re going to be strapped on top of a rocket. What’s the sensation? Can you describe what you’ll be feeling, here in a couple of weeks, when you feel the initial ignition and that rocket begins to ignite?

Butch: I’ll do the best I can. Most things in life—reality doesn’t quite compare to what your mind thinks it will be. Launching on a rocket exceeds every thought I could ever imagine it would be. [Laughter] When the solid rocket boosters separate, there are loud explosions going on as the pyro bolts fire. The whole vehicle shakes, and rattles, and rolls. When the external tank separated and the reaction control system gets in the nose of the space shuttle—fire / a big orange blast right up in front of my fore window.

The Soyuz launch is not exactly the same as a shuttle launch; but I’m told it’s every bit, if not more so, as far as the physical sensations go. I imagine what it will be like; but because of the shuttle history, I’m sure that it’s going to be more than I’m even thinking it will be now. [Laughter]

Dennis: I’d like to invite our listeners to pray for you and for safety for the crew that’s up there. I’d like to ask Bob to pray for Deanna and the girls, and the others who will be joining them, and just ask God for safety.

Bob: Let me pray.

Father, we marvel at Your creation. The heavens declare Your glory. And as we think about Butch and the rest of the crew onboard the International Space Station, we’re just mindful of the fact that that’s just a peek into an infinite galaxy, an amazing space that You have created. Lord, we do ask for protection for this team.

We ask for peace and comfort for Deanna and the girls as their dad / their husband is away. We pray that this time would bring great glory and honor to You, that Butch would have opportunity to witness his faith to the others who are onboard the space station.
and also to be able to serve competently. Keep him safe and protected. I pray that the mission goes well and that they are able to accomplish all they intend to accomplish. Lord, be with them during these days. We ask in Your name. Amen.

Butch: Amen.

Dennis: Amen. Butch, if you do get a chance to lead a small group in space, going through Stepping Up, I want you to tell those guys that I told you there’s no gravitational pull in space to step up. [Laughter]

Butch: Amen.

Dennis: But when they get back home, there is going to be some gravitational pull that will challenge them, as men, to slide and not step up. [Laughter]

Butch: Yes, sir—how true—very true. Thank you for that, Dennis. Thank you.

Bob: Alright. Thanks, guys.

Deanna: Thank you.

Dennis: God bless you guys.

Butch: God bless you all as well. Thank you.

Bob: Bye-bye.

Deanna: Bye-bye.

Butch: Bye.

Bob: Let me just say, for our listeners here, Dennis—if they would like to find out more about the study that hopefully Captain Wilmore is going to be able to take guys through in outer space—the Stepping Up video series for men—they can go to our website, FamilyLifeToday.com. Click the link at the top of the page that says “GO DEEPER.” There is information about the ten-week study that’s available there.

In fact, we’ve heard from a lot of guys, who are launching this study in the new year in their church or with their small group. That’s something you might want to think about. Again, go to FamilyLifeToday.com. Click the link at the top of the page that says, “GO DEEPER.” You can find out more about the Stepping Up ten-week video series for men. If you’d like to call us for more information, call 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then, the word, “TODAY”—just ask about the ten-week series. Someone can answer any questions you might have or make arrangements to get the series shipped to you.
By the way, “Thank you,” to all of you, who over the last several weeks, have been in touch with us, making yearend contributions to support the ministry of FamilyLife Today and to make sure that, as we head into 2015, we head in ready to go. This is really a pivotal time for our ministry. It’s in these last few weeks of the year, as people are doing yearend giving, that we begin to calibrate what we’re going to be able to do in the year ahead.

Your sacrificial giving, at this point in time, really is strategic. It’s really very critical for the ministry of FamilyLife, going forward. As many of you know, the donations that are being given during the month of December are being matched, on a dollar-for-dollar basis, up to a total of $2 million. We are grateful for the friends who have made these matching funds available, and we’re hoping to take full advantage of that matching gift.

To do that, we need to hear from you today. Would you consider going to FamilyLifeToday.com? Click in the upper right-hand corner of the screen, where it says “I Care,” and make an online donation. Or call 1-800-FL-TODAY. You can make a donation over the phone. And, of course, you can always mail a donation to us. Our mailing address is FamilyLife Today at PO Box 7111, Little Rock, AR; and our zip code is 72223.

Now, I hope you can join us tomorrow. Dennis will be back in the studio with us, and we’re going to have an opportunity to meet a man who was one of Dennis’ early mentors. In fact, this is the guy who gave Dennis probably the most significant marital advice he ever received in the early years of his marriage. You’ll meet Carl Wilson tomorrow. Hope you can join us for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

FamilyLife Today is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

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