Bob: It takes a lot of focus to be a Navy fighter pilot. When someone has that kind of focus, it's easy for a spouse to be left behind. That was the experience of pilot Butch Wilmore.

Butch: I didn't completely understand that since He gave me a wife and gave me children, my number one God-given responsibility was as a husband and as a father. There was a time that I did not completely understand that. I would sacrifice certain times with my wife, because I was focused on the responsibilities of my job. I was giving her the understanding, which was true by my actions, that she was not first.

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today* for Thursday, December 22nd. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. So how do you keep your priorities as a husband in order when you're a fighter pilot in the Navy, hoping to, one day, be an astronaut?

We'll talk today with Butch and Deanna Wilmore about that. Stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us on the Thursday edition. We would have to describe the people we're going to hear from today as a real—really a down-to-earth couple; don't you think? [Laughter] I thought you'd like that one! I thought you'd like that.

Dennis: For goodness' sakes, Bob, he's an astronaut! [Laughter] He's not down to earth!

Bob: We had the—

Dennis: He's about being above the earth.

Bob: About a year ago, we had the—
**Dennis:** That may be the worst corn you have served up. [Laughter] It's not even got butter on it.

**Bob:** About a year ago, we had the longest distance phone call that we've ever made, here on *FamilyLife Today*, when we had a phone call with Butch Wilmore, who was, at the time, onboard the space station.

**Dennis:** Commanding it; wasn't he?

**Bob:** He was the commander, and it was his wedding anniversary. He wanted to say, “Happy anniversary!”

**Dennis:** We gave him the ultimate spike! [Laughter] I mean, let’s face it; huh?

**Bob:** He called from space and, on national radio, said, “Happy anniversary!” to his wife.

**Dennis:** Every man in America, who’s married and thinking about his anniversary: “How can you top *that* one?!”

**Bob:** When he came back to earth, you had the opportunity to sit down with Butch and his wife and get more of their story. We’re going to share that with our listeners on today’s program.

But before we do that, we need to give our listeners an update on what is going on with the matching-gift opportunity, here at FamilyLife. We’ve got our Matching Gift Monitor, Michelle Hill, who is joining us today. Michelle, we’ve been hearing from our listeners. It’s encouraging, as we head into yearend, to know that we’ve got listeners who are standing with us and helping us take full advantage of this matching-gift opportunity.

**Michelle:** Well it is encouraging Bob, and what’s even better is that thanks to a new development we actually announced yesterday, the match has grown by over half a million dollars. We’re now at one point eight million dollars thanks to those generous donors who plussed the match…and what THAT means is that a lot more people like Megan, and William and Nathan and Sheila and Kim and Juan can join the team and have their gift tripled… and so far almost six thousand folks have done that, so thanks to them we’re at nine hundred forty one thousand dollars as of today.
Dennis: I just want to step in here before we have a little chat with an astronaut. I’ve been to Houston / I’ve been to NASA—I’ve seen what it takes to put somebody in outer space. What I want you to know, as a listener, is—it takes a lot of people doing a lot of things to get people safely into outer space and back home.

You know what? This broadcast is not NASA; but it takes a lot of people—doing a lot of very faithful actions and executing with excellence—to produce this broadcast and have it delivered on this station to make an impact in your marriage and your family. You know what? It’s impacting a lot of people’s lives.

I don’t know what’s happened—but in the past six to twelve months, I’ve had more people come up to me, Bob—and I think it’s because the culture has sapped the life out of marriage and family by attempting to redesign what God clearly created. I think that people are really, genuinely appreciative of what we do, here on FamilyLife Today, every day in talking about what the Bible has to say about marriage and family and equipping people to be successful to do marriage and family God’s way. That’s our mission!

If you go to Houston, there are all of these statements about the mission. You know what? If you come to FamilyLife, FamilyLife Today has got a real mission. I believe it’s the mission of the day. Would you stand with us and help us with our mission?—keeping this program coming on this station to your home, and to hundreds of thousands of others here in America, and in more than three dozen countries around the world. We need your help.

Bob: The mission we’re talking about is “…effectively developing godly marriages and families, who change the world, one home at a time.” You can be part of that mission when you go to FamilyLifeToday.com to make a donation, or when you call 1-800-FL-TODAY to make a donation over the phone. Or, if you’d like to mail a donation to us, our mailing address is PO Box 7111, Little Rock, AR; and our zip code is 72223. We look forward to hearing from you. Thanks for helping us take advantage of this matching-gift opportunity.

Alright; we’re going to hear now from the conversation you had with Butch and Deanna Wilmore after Butch had stepped back onto terra firma. We thought the place to start our conversation today was the question you asked Butch and Deanna about when they first got married and if Deanna understood what she was getting into, marrying a fighter pilot.

[Recorded Interview]
Dennis: So here, you married a fighter pilot.

Deanna: Yes! [Laughing]

Dennis: I mean, that’s a breed of their own kind; right? I could ask you to comment on that—[Laughter]—I’m sure you could really tell us. When did it finally dawn on you that: “This fighter pilot I married—he’s a wild man!”?—[Laughter]—but a wild man with a lot of discipline and a lot of commitment.

Deanna: Right.

Dennis: How long into your marriage before you realized that?

Deanna: You know, probably when I had a family cruise on the aircraft carrier. You got to go onto the aircraft carrier and watch the landings. He was actually deployed at the time, and I went on another aircraft carrier. We got up on the eagle’s nest, where you can stand. They come, and they land. It was just like: “Ahh! This is so exciting! This is so thrilling!” I never realized how thrilling it was—because, you know, I knew he landed on ships; but, “Okay, so what?” [Laughter]—until I was out there! [Laughter]

Dennis: “So what? He’s landing 668 times on ships?” Wow! [Laughter] And you do love it!

Butch: You know, I feel very, very blessed to have been able to do some of the things that I dreamed about. The chance to—you know, going in the Navy, there are no promises that you’re going to even get jet aircraft, but I was able to get jet aircraft.

I’m just an old country boy from Tennessee.

In fact, I give God the glory. I’m grateful for all of the things He’s given me, but even more than that—that’s the professional part—but even more than that, is that He saved me. He reached down into my wretched heart—

Dennis: Right.

Butch: —and said, “I’m going to clean you up; and I’m going to give you a lovely person, who’s going to challenge you and, you know, make you toe the line for His glory.” Even more than all this other stuff, that’s the main thing.
Dennis: How has she challenged you?

Butch: Constantly. [Laughter]

Dennis: How?

Butch: Constantly. Oh, my!

Dennis: Specifically how?

Deanna: Oh, no! [Laughter]

Butch: I’ve joked—you know, 200 feet, 500 knots, upside down in a jet aircraft; pulling up on the vertical and then you come around and you land on aircraft carriers / you launch into space; you go 17,500 miles per hour; and all this other stuff—she’s the one that has helped put that in perspective. She’s the one bringing me back to what really, truly matters. Always the reminder: “God’s Word, God’s will, family worship—times that we can get our girls together.” She’s the one who encourages and keeps that going.

Dennis: You know, one of the questions I wanted to ask you—because the flyboys are notorious for working hard, working long, working intense, but then playing when they’re off duty. You undoubtedly, early in your marriage, flying these jets, got some time off with the guys. How did you handle it? Talk about how you viewed yourself facing the temptations and going with your friends, being salt and light while, at the same time, facing some tough circumstances.

Butch: I need daily, continual encouragement and instruction from the Word.

Dennis: Yes.

Butch: I need it / I know that I need it—so I don’t slack on that. There are some things you can’t do well, flying onboard the aircraft carrier, unless you’re disciplined and focused. You don’t want to make mistakes. Certainly anytime you’re, you know, in aspects of doing a spacewalk or anything else like that, you need to be disciplined for the details.

And the most important part of my life is my spiritual journey. It takes a great, great deal of discipline. So I make time to be in the Word every single day. I love all people—I want people, more than anything, to know my Lord. Sometimes, when you are with a
group and they’re going somewhere—you just silently peel off and don’t go with them—that viewed not lovingly. But you can’t go with the lost and sin with them.

That’s something that Jesus never did. He intermingled with them, but He never went and sinned with them, obviously, and neither can we. We must love them / share with them, but when it goes to the point—if there’s a point where they go to where it crosses that line of sin, we have to peel off. That’s one thing that the Lord has helped me do in those situations over the years.

Dennis: So you fly in formation with them for the relationship to let them know you love them.

Butch: Yes.

Dennis: But if they’re flying into enemy territory, where you have no business—

Butch: Right; I have to peel off.

Dennis: Deanna, a woman feeds off of her trust of her husband / trust in her man.

Deanna: Yes.

Dennis: How do his comments here make you feel as a wife?

Deanna: Oh, great! And I always knew this when he would go on deployments—that he would, maybe, you know, go and eat with all the guys; but when they were going on to do the other things, that he would not participate. He was always sharing with me and up-front about what was going on. That really helped me to have trust and confidence in him.

Butch: And it wasn’t like talking about individuals—names didn’t matter—

Deanna: Right.

Butch: —just situations that I would share.

Deanna: Yes.

Butch: And say: “You know, this is where I’m weak. Because I’m weak, I don’t go there.” I’d try to share that with her, because she helps keep me accountable. I mean, I
have other men that hold / who help keep me accountable; but my wife helps keep me accountable as well.

The only way she can do that is if I’m open to her about where I’m weak.

**Dennis:** You know, people look at your marriage, and they see what you guys have accomplished together; and they go: “They’re just perfect! [Laughter] They just don’t have any struggles.” [Laughter]

**Butch:** Oh, my!

**Deanna:** Oh, my!

**Dennis:** Have you guys ever gone through a real—a real hard time in your marriage?

**Deanna:** Yes.

**Butch:** That was quick! [Laughter] Oh, yes! Yes.

**Dennis:** If you’d be willing to share a little bit of going through a tough time—what you learned?

**Butch:** You know, there was a time that I didn’t completely understand that my number one, God-given responsibility in this life—since he gave me a wife and gave me children—my number one, God-given responsibility was as a husband and as a father. There was a time that I did not completely understand that. I would sacrifice certain times with my wife, because I was focused on the responsibilities of my job. I was giving her the understanding—which was true by my actions—that she was not first, because I didn’t understand that that was the most important thing. I mean, I tried—you know—balance is everything. When you’ve got so many irons in the fire, it’s hard to balance everything. I would try to balance them equally until I realized that my role as a husband, or my role as a father, outweigh these others. Even balance is not the right balance. They need to be of more importance.

**Dennis:** I truly believe you believe that.

**Butch:** I do.
Dennis: And I also believe there was something that helped teach you that. Do you want to share what happened that ultimately brought him to that conclusion?

Deanna: Wow! You know, I think it was—the hardest started once we—of course, he’s still in the Navy—but once we left the Navy life—

Butch: Fleet Navy.

Deanna: —the Fleet Navy—and went to NASA, he started in the astronaut program. He started doing some things that I would say, “I would rather you not go there.”

Maybe it was with another co-worker—you know—a female. He would say: “Oh, but it is okay. You know, everybody else backed out; and if I don’t go, she doesn’t have anyone to go with her,”—or whatever it may have been—those kinds of things sort of started happening, where I knew he was not honoring me / listening to my requests. I wouldn’t ever say: “Do not go there. I forbid that.”

Dennis: Right.

Butch: I think you need to understand, too, that in this balance thing that I just mentioned, I’m trying to balance all of my responsibilities, equally, which was wrong.

Deanna: Yes.

Dennis: You know, that’s an important statement.

Butch: It is.

Deanna: Yes.

Butch: Because the signal she’s getting is not that she’s number one.

Dennis: But she’s equal.

Butch: That she’s equal to other things. So she’s got that signal, and then these situations—which, now, I don’t think would be as big of a deal—but during that period, they were a big deal because she was equal with these other things.

Once I understood my role—my responsibility / my God-given responsibilities—correctly, and I rectified through interaction. You know, I leave work at work. When it’s
time to be home, I go home. I try to—you know—balance it all and get everything done before I get home. Therefore, I’m not doing work at home. Once I started doing that—giving her the love and affection and my daughters what they deserve—that was when she sees, “Okay; you’ve got the picture.” I guess!

Dennis: Yes.

Butch: And now, in a similar situation, those situations would not be as big of a deal as they were then.

Dennis: We’ve talked a bit here about moving out of your Navy career—of course, you’re still in the Navy—but focusing on NASA. When you were a little boy, did you think about being a pilot? Did you think about going into outer space?

Butch: Well, the first thing I wanted to be—when I was a young, little boy—was a garbage man, because a garbage man could take that big can and lift it up on his shoulder; and he was really strong. So that was first! After that—[Laughter]

Dennis: That sounds like Popeye the Sailor Man to me! [Laughter]

Deanna: That’s it. [Laughter]

Butch: I think I was like any other child—seeing things—you know, way out there on the edge and flying in space—I mean, not much further out on the edge that you can get than that. I think, as much as any other child, I had the same kind of dream.

But when I got into college, I really started getting a patriotic tug to do my part for my country. That’s really what started to channel the direction for the Navy. I wanted to—once that happened, and I was selected a jet aircraft and all of that—I went to test pilot school and became a test pilot and did that stuff. Then, it was through that process of growing and going forward that eventually the astronaut thing—obviously, I had a couple of wicket things that you had to cross before you would even be eligible, and then the application from there. Yes; it was a thought, way back when; but it wasn’t like a drive of, “I’m going to go for that!”

Dennis: Yes; let’s talk about the wickets you had to go through, because most of us have no idea. You’re nodding your head, Deanna. [Laughter] We have no idea what it takes to become an astronaut. [Laughter]
In 1998, you became a finalist to enter the astronaut program with NASA; and you got turned down.

Butch: I did; indeed. I think there were six-ish thousand people who submitted an application that year. NASA goes through its process and boils it down to 120 that they actually bring, over a five- or six-week period—bring to Houston, Texas, to the Johnson Space Center and interview through a week-long process of medical and all of this stuff. I did that. I went down and interviewed.

The wicket after that—after the interview process was done—if they’re serious, they do a background check. Those aren’t inexpensive, as I understand. They did the background check on me. I was looking favorable, like it was probably going to happen; and it didn’t. The thing was—I was coming up on deployment. Three days from the time that I finally got the phone call, I was either going to go to Houston and start a whole different life, or I was going to go on deployment.

I got the call: “Hey, Butch. We really appreciate everything, but it just didn’t happen this time.” So, anyway—

Dennis: That’s tough for a guy.

Butch: It was tough; yes. It sure was.

Deanna: But he knew there was another opportunity.

Butch: Potentially, there would be another chance to try.

Dennis: Spiritually, do you remember how you spiritually processed that?

Butch: Just like she said—I mean, in your mind, you go, “Hey, Lord, whatever You have planned.” You know, I look back now—I’m much older now than I was then—I look back at my life, and I see so—oh, my gosh!—every instance, the Lord’s hand in things. Everything turns out for the better—it seems as you look back—than it was when you were despondent. Even then, I think I processed and said, “Lord, You have been so true to me. I see the truth in Your Word. It’s going to be okay.”

That still doesn’t say that you don’t have the down feeling you have to work through it. Even when you lose someone, and you know they’re gone to be with the Lord—there is a period the Lord gave us of grieving that helps us to separate. That’s a positive thing—grieving is good.
In a situation like that—certainly not to that level / nowhere near that level—but there’s a period of grieving you go through. The Lord helps you go through that, and process and separate from that opportunity that you were looking forward to. So, in that light, it was somewhat similar.

**Dennis:** I want to underline two things you guys did. One is—you believed the right thing about God.

**Butch:** Yes.

**Dennis:** I’ve said many times on this broadcast: “The most important thing about a person is what you think about God. If you know He can be trusted—

**Butch:** Amen.

**Dennis:** —“then, even in the most disappointing circumstances, you can, by faith, embrace God and say, ‘Okay: I don’t like this. This doesn’t feel good. This is not my dream. This is not my hope, but I will trust You.’”

**Butch:** True.

**Dennis:** The other thing—Deanna, I just want to brag on you; because, when a man goes through a loss like this, his bride / the love of his life doesn’t need to leave him alone—she needs to pursue him. You said you went overseas twice. While he was deployed, you met him and spent some time with him.

I’m sure, as you took walks, and as you talked together, that was a part of the healing of moving on and getting your sights set on the future.

**Butch:** No doubt, Dennis. Oh, my! Deanna—I mean, those times—she’s always been encouraging/uplifting. So many times—not even sharing this with her all the time—I’ve looked back and just praised our Lord that He gave me her for those times. I mean, honestly, what a blessing to share your life with someone. If you don’t get selected for something like this, and so few people get the opportunity to do, and she goes, “The Lord’s got something better coming!” That’s her first words—I don’t know that it was exactly—but it was along those lines. To share that!—boy, that gives you a little pep in your step!

**Dennis:** The truth is powerful.
**Butch:** It is!—absolutely right.

**Dennis:** And that’s not a lie. That’s not just a pie-in-the-sky theology. God has got something better. If He shut this door, there’s something He’s got planned.

**Butch:** “All things work together for good for those who love the Lord and are called according to His purpose,”—all things.

**Dennis:** That wasn’t the end of this story, though, with NASA.

**Butch:** As it turns out.

**Dennis:** Within two years, you got accepted.

**Butch:** I thought, “Well, I’ll try one more time.” [Laughter]

**Deanna:** “One more time!” [Laughter]

[Studio]

**Bob:** Well, we’ve been listening to a conversation that you had a while back with Butch and Deanna Wilmore. I think all of us go through seasons, where we think: “This is not what I had hoped life would be like. This is not what my plan was for life.” What we do in that moment / what we choose to do in that moment is determinative about what happens, going forward.

**Dennis:** “Will you trust God with the circumstances and how they turn out?” or “Will you allow those circumstances to define you and cause you to become hopeless?” I’m telling you, Bob—I don’t know how people live today without getting in the Book—getting in the Bible—and being reminded who God is, and who we aren’t. We’re not in control.

At Houston, there is Mission Control. In the heavens, there is God who’s in control.

**Bob:** Right.

**Dennis:** Will you surrender to the Almighty God of the universe, and will you allow Him to begin to call the shots in your life?
Bob: I’m thinking about folks, who will be getting together with friends and family over the next couple of days.

Dennis: Those circumstances will test your faith.

Bob: You can be discouraged by the fact that things aren’t going the way you always hoped they would go with your kids or with extended family members.

Dennis: There was only one perfect family, and it didn’t turn out so good in the Garden. [Laughter] I’m sorry, but you know what? We’re going to have to learn to deal with imperfection—other people’s and our own imperfections.

Bob: Yes; I’ll tell you who’s figured that out is Aubrey and Gwen Hayslip, who live in Ocoee, Florida; because it was 41 years ago today that Aubrey and Gwen became husband and wife.

You don’t stay married for 41 years unless you’ve figured out how to deal with one another’s imperfections and the flaws that come with a marriage relationship. “Happy 41st anniversary!” today to the Hayslips—I hope you guys have a great celebration.

They got married one year before FamilyLife began. We’ve been celebrating our 40th anniversary all year long and really celebrating how God’s used this ministry in the lives of couples, like the Hayslips, and millions of other couples all around the world. Again, we want to say, “Thanks,” to those of you who are a part of this mission with us—those of you who support the ministry of FamilyLife financially. We talked earlier about the matching-gift opportunity. If you’re able to help us with a yearend donation, your donation will be effectively tripled thanks to the matching-gift opportunity. Again, we’d ask you to go online and make a donation at FamilyLifeToday.com; or call 1-800-FL-TODAY to donate.

Or you can mail your donation to FamilyLife Today at PO Box 7111, Little Rock, AR; our zip code is 72223. If God has used the ministry of FamilyLife in your life this year, we hope you’ll consider making a yearend contribution and become part of the mission of FamilyLife.

Tomorrow, we get a chance to hear how Butch Wilmore eventually made it into outer space. I hope you can tune in to hear the rest of Butch and Deanna’s story tomorrow.
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'll 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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