

“Jeff has served this country as a warrior in the cockpit, for the sake of science and exploration at the International Space Station, and now as a warrior for the kingdom of Jesus Christ. His life serves as an example of how our Lord reaches into the wretched hearts of sinful men and transforms them into bearers of the only true light—the gospel that saves. Jeff would be the first to say, like the apostle Paul, ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost’ (1 Timothy 1:15). Get ready to be blessed by a life that began in small town Wisconsin and eventually blasted off into the heavens, all to the glory of our Lord.”

Barry “Butch” E. Wilmore, NASA Astronaut and U.S. Navy Captain, Retired

“The heavens declare the glory of God’—and it’s refreshing when astronauts do too! You’ll be encouraged as Colonel Williams, through the story of his time in space, points you to the God Who created the sun, moon, and stars and then stepped into this world to save sinners. I highly recommend this read!”

Ken Ham, Founder CEO, Answers in Genesis, Creation Museum, and Ark Encounter

“It’s been said that no one comes back from space unchanged. But the same could be said of the journey to become an astronaut. *Zero Gravity* is Jeff’s and Anna-Marie’s story. It’s a gripping chronicle of a young Army officer determined to fulfill his life’s dream of joining the NASA Astronaut Corps, while his wife tries to hold their young family together and keep up with his globe-spanning schedule. It’s a story of dogged determination, crippling setbacks, crushing defeats, a crumbling marriage. But it’s also a story of spiritual awakening, perseverance, and ultimately God’s grace. In the telling we get a look into Jeff’s 534 days working and living off-Earth, viewing God’s creation from His point of view but through Jeff’s trained eye. And in the midst of it all, Jeff and Anna-Marie find in Christ the only way to hold on to each other—never giving up, and never backing down.”

James C. Adamson, NASA Astronaut and U.S. Army Colonel, Retired

“This book tells the story of a true American—one who was raised on a farm, worked diligently, and accomplished much. Discipline, loyalty, and focus all define Jeff. But what stands out most to me is his deep love for God and his constant awe at the grandeur of divine providence. Jeff has a rare ability to perceive the hand of God behind the laws of physics, the motion of the stars, the course of human history, and even the smallest details of daily life. This perspective makes him one of the most genuine and sincere Christians I have ever known. It is a privilege and a blessing to worship and serve the Lord alongside him.”

Aleksey Kolomiytsev, Senior Pastor, Word of Grace Bible Church, Battle Ground, Washington, and Head of Word of Grace Ministries

“A compelling story of faith, perseverance, and the selfless pursuit of space exploration. While Jeff’s dependability, integrity, and passion for the Russian people shine throughout, this book is ultimately about something far greater—the extraordinary and redemptive work of God through ordinary people. An inspiring read that reminds us how purpose and grace shape even the most remarkable journeys.”

Patrick G. Forrester, NASA Astronaut and U.S. Army Colonel, Retired

“Anyone who has heard just a part of Jeff’s story has probably said, ‘You ought to write a book.’ Of course, one of his most amazing qualities is his humility, so someone else had to write the story that so many of us have longed to read and share. This is an amazing tale of courage, dedication, hard work, and providence. If you thought the space shuttle and the International Space Station were the height of Jeff’s story, you don’t know the half of it! But the most compelling aspect of this book is the tapestry of God’s grace woven throughout. *Zero Gravity* will take you on an unexpected journey that will encourage and inspire.”

Dr. Voddie T. Baucham, Jr., Author, President of Founders Seminary, and Founding Dean, African Christian University, Zambia

“When I was growing up, astronauts had an almost mythical status. I never thought I would meet one. I was in my fifties when I did meet Jeff Williams, and over the past two and a half decades, he has become a dear friend and a faithful partner in ministry. But he still holds that almost mythical image in my mind. Chris Anderson does a fine job of demythologizing Jeff, telling the story of his life in a compelling way. I especially appreciate how Chris highlights not only Jeff’s storied career, but also his deep love for Christ. Everyone who knows Jeff will agree that his faith is really the most important thing about this amazing man.”

Phil Johnson, Executive Director, Grace to You



Astronaut Jeff Williams
Official crew photograph of NASA (2016)

CHRIS ANDERSON

ZERO GRAVITY

**THE STORY OF ASTRONAUT JEFF WILLIAMS
AND HIS 534 DAYS IN SPACE**



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Zero Gravity: The Story of Astronaut Jeff Williams and His 534 Days in Space

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*To Bob and Linda McIntyre,
who first introduced me to Jeff
and who were faithful friends in
challenging times.*

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FOREWORD

Jeff Williams has traveled farther, flown faster, stayed aloft longer, seen more of the world, and taken more spectacular photographs of the Earth than just about anyone. He's also one of the kindest, most approachable men I've ever known. He carries himself with a quiet, dignified humility that few would expect from a veteran of four very important space flights.

Jeff's accomplishments are staggering. He served as commander of International Space Station (ISS) Expeditions 22 and 48. He logged 534 days in space—more than any other American man at the time. He took more photographs of Earth than any other astronaut ever, setting a record that may never be broken. He logged nearly thirty-two hours in a space suit outside the ISS during five separate spacewalks. He was launched into orbit three times from Kazakhstan aboard Russian Soyuz spacecraft.

Jeff is fluent in the Russian language. (He learned to speak Russian as an adult. This was a mandatory aspect of his career as an astronaut, enabling him to work closely with Russian team members on the ISS.)

One of the roles Jeff filled during his first stint in the ISS (Expedition 13) was that of science officer. Jeff has a degree in applied science and engineering from West Point. His career and his worldview belie the myth that one cannot be a devout Christian and a serious scientist. Jeff is most definitely both. He is the author of *The Work of His Hands: A View of God's Creation from Space*. The book is a beautiful folio of Jeff's ISS photographs, annotated with his own notes, demonstrating that creation reveals the majesty, power, wisdom, love, and goodness of God. He also shows that the facts of creation affirm the truth of Scripture. God's handiwork is clearly evident across the heavens.

Jeff is wholeheartedly committed to the veracity and authority of Scripture, and that conviction has always guided what he does with his personal time. His work for the kingdom of the Lord is as impressive as all his accomplishments at NASA. Indeed, from heaven's perspec-

tive, the ministries he has devoted himself to certainly have more eternal significance. Jeff is now retired from NASA, and he is using his fluency in Russian to help spread the gospel in Russian-speaking communities. He has been a personal help and encouragement to me for years, serving on the board of Grace to You, our worldwide media ministry.

Not many men need to have the story of their life written before their life is actually over. Jeff has done so much and seen so many cosmic wonders firsthand that at least the first installment of his life story is full and ready to be told now. I'm grateful for this book. I trust it will help countless readers get to know Jeff as I know him. He is a good friend, a truly honorable and faithful man, a steadfast believer in the truth of Scripture, a devout servant of Christ, and a sincere lover of our glorious Creator.

John MacArthur¹

¹ John MacArthur provided this foreword on April 8, 2025. He was fighting to recover from a debilitating illness at the time, and he went to be with Jesus just a few months later, on July 14, 2025. This is among the last things John wrote, highlighting his esteem for Jeff. We are honored that this book includes such kind words from such a choice servant of God, penned during such a difficult time.



Jeff Williams with John MacArthur
The Masters Seminary, Los Angeles, California (2021)

Introduction

THE WONDER OF FLIGHT

“Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest.”

—King David, Psalm 55:6

“I can observe the earth. . . . One can see everything.”

—Yuri Gagarin, the first man to orbit the Earth

Five hundred thirty-four days. Seventy-six weeks. Eighteen months. One-and-a-half years.

When Jeff Williams touched down in Kazakhstan on September 7, 2016, he had logged more time in space than any other American in history. Eight years later, only one American exceeds him.

During his time on the International Space Station, Jeff traveled more than 226,000,000 miles, orbiting the earth sixteen times a day at an altitude of two hundred fifty miles above the Earth's surface.

Two hundred twenty-six million miles.

Jeff Williams is among the most decorated astronauts in American history. Over four missions, spanning nearly two decades, Jeff has been on the cutting edge of discovery. Aboard the International Space

ZERO GRAVITY

Station he has circled the Earth more than 8,500 times, finishing each lap in just ninety minutes at a speed of 17,500 miles per hour. He has launched on an American space shuttle and on three Russian Soyuz rockets. He has lived on the International Space Station, and he has spacewalked outside of it. He has taken more than 500,000 photographs of the Earth from outer space—a number not even approached by anyone else in history.

Amazingly, just a century ago, there were no pictures of the blue orb we call home. Only God had seen our round planet suspended in space. Jeff has experienced things that the rest of humanity, both past and present, only dreamed of. And dream they did.

Greek mythology tells of Icarus' gaining magical powers and learning to fly, albeit with tragic consequences. Chinese legends dating from 2200 B.C. tell of emperors riding in flying chariots. The Scriptures tell of Elijah flying to heaven in a flaming chariot (2 Kings 2:11). The psalmist envies the freedom of the birds: "Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest" (Ps 55:6). Greek author Antonius Diogenes (300 B.C.) wrote of a fictional trip to the moon. Leonardo da Vinci put his astounding brainpower to work designing flying machines in pursuit of a goal he wouldn't reach. Native Americans have long idolized the eagle and imagined joining in its flight.

Before modern flight was possible, it was imagined, even in modern times. Jules Verne wrote of flight and space exploration in his fictional works *From the Earth to the Moon* and *Round the Moon*. In time, dreamers began to replace imagination with math, bringing the impossible nearer. Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, a Russian mathematician, began postulating in 1898 how humans could break free from gravity. Just a decade later, American Robert Hutchings Goddard—part crackpot, part genius—labored to build a rocket, believing (rightly) that such an instrument would be the best hope to send a human into space. German mathematician Hermann Oberth carried on the same work in the 1920s. He was joined by his countryman and coworker Max Valier to found the *Verein für Raumschiffahrt* (VfR)—the "Society for Space Travel." The VfR was a rocket society whose goal was to develop aircraft which they believed would eventually get

humans to outer space. And they weren't nuts. Humanity was getting warmer. But the immensity of the task was ironically symbolized by the death of Valier when one of his rockets exploded.

Not all attempts to fly were so scientific. At times, humanity's obsession with flight bordered on the ridiculous, as with the firing and short flight (or long fall) of the first human cannonball, Rossa Matilda Richter, in 1877. But flight—*true flight*—was impossible. For millennia. For all of human history, humanity was tethered to the ground. Everyone who challenged gravity lost.

Until, in 1909, the world changed. That's no exaggeration. Two stubbornly ingenious brothers from Dayton, Ohio, unwilling to accept the impossibility of flight, changed the world, for good. From the day William and Orville Wright made their triumphant flight over the sand dunes at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, humanity's infatuation with flight has accelerated at breakneck speed. When flight finally came, it came in a mind-numbing rush.

Viola Louise Engel was just a toddler when the Wrights first defied gravity in 1909. She was born in St. Mary's, Ohio—just sixty miles from Dayton. Undoubtedly, she would come to learn about the heroes from her home state. Perhaps she would hear of how planes were weaponized in the Great War, just a decade after Kitty Hawk. She was dating her sweetheart, Stephen Armstrong, when Charles Lindbergh first crossed the Atlantic in the *Spirit of St. Louis* in 1927. Viola and Stephen married, and they would see flight advance so much during the 1930s and 40s that air superiority would become a key to victory in World War II. In the years after the war, in rapid succession, the couple would see the invention of the jet, the breaking of the sound barrier, and the breaking of the *gravity* barrier.

In fact, the science of flight would advance so rapidly that Stephen and Viola's son Neil would not only fly, but would be the first man to walk—*on the moon*.

Think of it! It took sixty short years—1909 to 1969—for flight to take us from the dunes to the moon.

ZERO GRAVITY

Humanity's obsession with flight continues into the twenty-first century. It's now more than legend. It's more than science. It's a romance—a relentless love of achieving what was once deemed impossible. This love of flight and space and progress is Jeff Williams' story.



Jeff Williams and Chris Anderson
Lilburn, GA (2018)

A faded, grayscale background image showing a parachute drop. Several parachutes are visible in the upper half of the frame, and in the lower half, soldiers are seen on the ground, some standing and some kneeling, near a military vehicle.

PART 1

LET DUTY BE WELL PERFORMED²

West Point, New York
(1958–1980)

² “Let duty be well performed” is a line from the West Point Alma Mater, a traditional song of devotion to the military academy. It has an almost religious feel to it, as cadets pledge loyalty to the United States and to West Point in life and death. Adding to its hymn-like feel is the fact that it was first used in public during the 1912 Baccalaureate service. The lyrics were written by CDT Paul S. Reinecke in 1908. The song describes military service “on land or sea,” as air power was unknown in 1908. Today, however, the Army serves on land, on sea, and in the skies—boasting more pilots and aircraft than even the United States Air Force.

Chapter 1

BEAST BARRACKS

“West Point doesn’t have fraternities, or sororities, or secret societies. Its graduates think of themselves as part of one Long Gray Line that stretches right back to that very first Class of 1802. They are part of a huge extended family that finds unity in a common experience and the character and purpose molded by that experience. To West Pointers, those three words, ‘Duty, Honor, Country,’ are more than a motto; they’re immortal ideals that guide your life.”

—Norman Schwarzkopf ³

In the summer of 1976—the United States’ bicentennial—Jeff Williams joined the long and distinguished list of West Point cadets. To be a West Pointer is a sacred trust. The school motto calls its student-soldiers to “Duty, Honor, Country.” The United States Military Academy boasts a regal history and a list of alumni that almost defies belief:

³ H. Norman Schwarzkopf, “Introduction,” in *West Point: Two Centuries of Honor and Tradition*, ed. Robert Cowley and Thomas Guinzburg (New York: Warner Books, 2002), 14. Schwarzkopf later remarks, “When you think of how much of America’s history and how many of its proudest moments were the result of leaders forged inside the Academy’s walls, you cannot help but be thankful.” Ibid.

Jefferson Davis, 1828
Robert E. Lee, 1829
William Tecumseh Sherman, 1840
Ulysses S. Grant, 1843
George E. Pickett and Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson, 1846
George A. Custer, 1861
John J. Pershing, 1886
Douglas MacArthur, 1903
George S. Patton, 1909
Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1915
Alexander M. Haig, 1947
Edwin “Buzz” Aldrin, 1951
H. Norman Schwarzkopf, 1956

But grit precedes glory. There was nothing prestigious about the welcome Jeff received at West Point.

THE END OF CIVILIAN LIFE

Individuality was sacrificed to structure at West Point. Freedom yielded to discipline. Privacy succumbed to accountability. And pride—like the flowing locks which the hippy-era recruits proudly wore onto campus—was quickly shorn and left in a pile on the floor.

Fresh out of high school, Jeff Williams and every other aspiring cadet had to survive “Beast Barracks,” West Point’s take on basic training. New cadets—plebes—were in for a surprise. American culture in the 1970s valued rebellion and self-expression. The United States Military Academy did not. Jeff recalls the beginning of his West Point experience as “a significant shock.”

Civilian recruits and their parents were welcomed to the academy on Reception Day (known as “R-Day”)—a family event which culminated in the reception parade and the momentous Cadet Oath of Allegiance. It was a brief calm before the storm that awaited the plebes. Once they bid their parents goodbye, civilian life ended, unceremoniously. Civilian clothes were exchanged for a t-shirt, shorts, dress socks, and dress shoes. The plebes wore a checklist clipped on with a safety pin.