OG Pastors: Faith Over a Lifetime

Episode 5 – Bill Wilder

STEWART: A lot of people talk about faith, but what does that actually look like over a lifetime? I'm Stewart Foley, and this is OG Pastors' Faith Over a Lifetime podcast.

STEWART: Hey, welcome back. This is Episode 5 of OG Pastors' Faith Over a Lifetime podcast. I'm Stew, also known as That Texas Podvangelist, and you can be, too—you can be a podvangelist if you'll just tell one person about this podcast. Our mission is simple: we sow seeds and let God take it from there. And our slogan is, "Tell one person." And today's guest, I'm thrilled. This person was one of the first people I noticed when I became—started going to our church, Hill Country Church. And so, it's a great opportunity to get to know our guest today a little bit better. He has spent more than three decades investing in youth through Texas high school football. There is no more competitive or intense football environment than the great state of Texas, without a doubt. Coach Bill Wilder has been coaching for 31 years. He's built a football program from the ground up, led defenses, developed young men, and raised a family with his wife, Jody. Since 2011, has, fortunately for us, called Fredericksburg, Texas his home. When Coach sent me his biography, though, the part that stuck with me wasn't about football. It was three words: "God is faithful." Bill describes God who has pursued him, redirected him, blessed him, forgiven him, provided for him, and carried him through brokenness and restoration. And after everything else life has brought his way, that's where he lands: "God is faithful." Bill Wilder, thank you very much for taking the time with us, and welcome to OG Pastors.

BILL: Alright, thanks for having me. I appreciate it.

STEWART: So, this is the beginning of the thing, right, is before you were the coach. Like, before anybody called you Coach Wilder, there was a kid that was born in Biloxi and spent your—your youth around a place called Ocean Springs, which I've never heard of, to be candid. Before your family moved to Houston, you describe the childhood as—a lot of us remember, riding bikes all day, playing in the woods in the bayous, and knowing it was time to head home when the streetlights came on. Take us back there. What was a young Bill Wilder like?

BILL: After we left Mississippi and we came to Houston, you know, it was in the big oil boom of—of the seventies. And so, uh, we were in the process of building a home. So, we were in the suburbs. And being in the suburbs

meant that there was nothing but just a few houses and endless land, you know, now. And so, we had the ability to have just constant adventures. And, you know, we were just out all the time. I had a whole zoo in my backyard. I was catching animals. I was always into catching snakes and shooting pellet guns and—and then, like I said, we literally could get on your bike and ride, and you might end up six miles away or something like that. I mean, we used to go down in the drainages and, like, come up on the side of roads, you know. It was like—it was like your own personal world. So, growing up in the seventies and eighties in that suburban environment that was incomplete, just dirt hills and trails, and because nothing had been built out yet. And so, it was just kind of like whatever a kid could possibly come up with, we were doing. And then, you know, so you had places to jump and ride your bike. And—and then, like I said, if—if we weren't doing that, we'd be out on the street playing baseball in the—in the cul-de-sac or playing touch football in the middle of the street, you know, and you're yelling, "Car!" and then you gotta get out of the way for—let a car come through and… And there were just like motorcycle gangs of kids riding bikes all over the place. And it was—it was a great, great childhood, you know. And uh, very blessed to—to have gotten to grow up in that era.

STEWART: That is super cool. So, tell me, okay, so, Mom, Dad, brother, sisters? What was—what was that count look like?

BILL: Just one sister. Just you and one sister. Yeah.

STEWART: So, like, these were like this—this gaggle of—of cyclists going all over the place. Like, that was neighborhood kids.

BILL: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I don't know how healthy it was, but, you know, the mosquito truck would come through blowing out the poison for the mosquitoes, and all these kids are riding in the smoke. It's poison. But you're having a blast. And uh, you know, it was just—it was very innocent, but a lot of fun. And uh, there was always, always something to do. You never spent any time inside, none. And uh, we were just outside doing stuff all the time and kind of grew up like that. And my mom stayed home most of the time. She had jobs here and there, but my dad was always at work. And, you know, but, you know, it was—he was gone, he was home every single day. My mom was cooking dinner. We sat down as a family every single night and—and had a meal together. And then, you know, back in the—like I said, during that era, you knew what was coming on on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, Thursday night. You knew when the Dukes of Hazzard were coming on. So, you had a schedule. And—and we—you know, just kind of lived in—in that world. That was—that was our life.

STEWART: That's super cool. If—if my notes are right, football showed up for you in second grade.

BILL: Yeah.

STEWART: And apparently never left. So, what did you—what did you love about it?

BILL: You know, I started playing baseball like in uh, kindergarten. And it was—I wasn't real good and…

STEWART: What position did you play? Did you—did you play—is was there such a thing as position in kindergarten?

BILL: Yeah, it was—it's called Wander Around, Pick Daisies, Left, Pick Daisies, yeah, you know. But you're just kind of moving around little kids. And but in second grade, I started playing football. And the group was—it was called AYA, Alief Youth Association. And uh, we had a guy named Tony Bear. And Tony Bear was a New York guy. He had the thick accent and—and he was just a—an Italian guy and just kind of machismo dude. And my first day at practice—I'm a little kid, and I'm like, "How much—is practice almost over?" and I got chewed out. I got chewed out. And from that day forward, I'm like, "I will never ask is practice almost over." But the thing that—that made me like, kind of like, "Wait a minute, I love this," was the physicality of it. I loved the contact. It was something, you know, some kids don't want that contact, some kids are drawn to that contact. And the first time—and I was a bigger kid for my age, but even when I was little—but the first time I hit and felt that and had the success—and that was a big part, you had the success—and I loved it. I was instantly—it was the only—it's one of those things in life, football is a weird thing. I mean, yeah, there's some unbelievable athletes, but it's one of the strange things in life that if you just try harder, you can be better. And a lot of things, you—you can't be faster, you can't be more coordinated necessarily, but in the game of football, if you just put more effort in, you can be more successful, incrementally and then exponentially, because it stacks on stacks on stacks. And that's what I loved about it because I wasn't like an athlete, and if I just tried really, really, really hard, I had success. When you had success, and I felt really, really good. And so that just started building and building and building, and that became, you know, we still—it was football in the fall, baseball in the spring. And I stopped playing baseball around fifth grade, I think, sixth grade. I just—it wasn't—it was slow, and there was no physicality in it. I just, like I said, I wasn't real good at it and it wasn't something that I really enjoyed, but man, football for me was just—just loved it, all the time.

STEWART: I will admit that one of the reasons I noticed you early on is because you are not—you are a—a larger than average human being. And I want to evidence that by the fact that you are in our good friend Dave White's office right now doing this podcast, and he just said before you started, "Hey, can I raise the computer up a little bit?" So, I think—I think

some of that's still true today. But so, there's something about your faith story that I really—I love and I hope you'll talk about it with us. Um, you don't—you don't have a particular date circled on the calendar when Jesus entered your life. And you said that he's been there as long as you can remember. I have to smile about that, you know, the "He's talking to me again." Can you talk about that boy's relationship with Jesus?

BILL: Growing up, you know, we went to church occasionally. And when I was real young, I don't really remember it, but I do remember this: in the summers, I spent the summers with my grandparents. And that we'd go back to Mississippi. That's what we called vacation. I mean, we didn't go anywhere, we went to Mississippi, and we spent the entire summer with my grandparents. And I had a grandmother, my—my Mammaw Stone, my mom's mother. She was a devoutly faithful woman. I mean, she loved the Lord. She loved the Lord with her whole heart. And she was the only person I ever saw get up every morning praying, reading her Bible every single day.

STEWART: Praise God. That's amazing.

BILL: And the first verse that I remember was I would sit down with her, not because I had to, but because I wanted to. And I'd sit down with her and she would talk and she would go through this. And, you know, the very first thing I remember…

STEWART: How old were you, ish?

BILL: I mean, dude, it had to have been second, third grade. I mean, just sitting there.

STEWART: So, you're like six—you're like seven, eight.

BILL: Yeah, yeah. Young. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. And then, you know, she taught me the 23rd Psalm and uh, I just was like, it just—it just resonated, you know. And then I wrote in the bio, we'd go to church. When we did go to church, I went—we'd always go to the Baptist church and there would always be an altar call. And the preacher would preach and then he'd give an invitation and I can tell you, if I went and they—there's never been an altar call in the history of altar calls that I didn't feel the need to go down and recommit my life again because that week—last week—I didn't do it right, and I want to recommit. And it's—it's always been uh, man, just like… I mean, it's kind of like a kid playing for a coach, and maybe that's why football resonated with me so much, too. I mean, I just want to please—I just want to please the Lord, I just want to please you, Jesus. I just—I just like want to—to please you, and I'm always falling short, so I always just kind of felt that, and I just want to please you. And then as I grew, I got—I, you know, started to understand that I was loved, you know. And that's just kind of been where it's—you know, I've just always felt this connection to prayer.

I've always felt um, a desire to pray, as a little kid, like, "Can I pray for the group?" Just this—just always something that, I don't know, came natural. And I think so much of it had to do with watching my grandmother and seeing her. So, the—the—the example that adults, quietly, kids are watching. Not every kid, but some kids watching, you know. And she's planting seeds. And she lived to 96 years old and came to live with us. And it was the same thing even after she came to live with us. I would still sit in her room and we would talk and we would read the Bible and she would pray. And I can remember my grandfather was not, like—he was not like that. But they would sit there and they'd watch, you know, Sunday, uh, he had cancer. They'd go to church sometimes, but most of the time they'd sit and watch TV because he was not in good health and… but every single time that they prayed on TV, I'd watch my grandmother and my grandfather hold hands. I mean, that carried a lot of weight, too. So, to this day, with my wife, Jody, every single time we pray, we're going to hold hands because that's connectedness. You know, that's… and even like, you—you've been in a fight, we've gone to church, we're not talking right now, we're in church, but we're not even talking to each other, we're mad. But man, when that prayer starts, I'm going to hold your hand, you know. And so, those examples when I was young carried so much weight for me and helped me to grow in faith. And you know, faith is a gift from God. And then the example is a gift from others. And then when you get—when you're given that gift and somebody gives you the example, then it starts to grow inside of you, I guess, would be the best way I can explain it. So, just from a young age.

STEWART: That—that is super inspirational, Bill. I mean, really. I mean, my grandma—my grandma was, like, my grandma raised me and I—I mean, without her, I don't know what would have happened. And—and it's interesting, and I remember my grandma kind of in that same age range. And it's, like, it's not every seven or eight-year-old boy that's going to go over there to his grandma and do that. Like, there's something special about that and the way that it stuck with you. And, you know, I just—uh, it inspires me. And I feel like, you know, the other thing we have in common is, like, you know, I mean, I feel like, you know, I fall short all the time, too. And in meeting people and doing this podcast, you and I have got good company. Uh, a lot of people feel like that, right? And we're all, you know—you put it really beautifully—I'm just trying to make—I'm just trying to do what Jesus wants me to do. And not do what the next harebrained idea that I came up with. Like, I want to listen and and wait and be patient. And I'm—and I'm working on that, you know, like I guess we all are. But so, okay, so then, these are your words, not mine—I would never say this, but nevertheless. You say that you went off to A&M, Texas A&M, without much of a game

plan. You liked animals—I love this part—you liked animals so you figured you'd become a veterinarian.

BILL: What everybody wanted. Yeah.

STEWART: You know what? I went to Mizzou and Mizzou has an amazing vet school, so I can kind of halfway relate to this. So then a couple of years later—and this—we share this, too. You discover that veterinary medicine requires a lot of school and discipline. And you decide that education and coaching might be a better fit. Now here's what I don't want to do. I don't want to be responsible for the one that is implying that education and coaching do not require school and discipline, because they do.

BILL: They're a little different, though.

STEWART: Right? And so, you said in your bio—and it all it says is, "Good decision." Can you talk to me about—about that?

BILL: Kind of going back a little bit to the faith story that I didn't put in the bio, well, was like in high school, when I got into high school sports and started playing high school football, I got introduced to FCA, Fellowship of Christian Athletes. And it was all of a sudden this thing where I was like, "Wait a minute, I can play this game that I love to play and there's an avenue to connect with God in the same vein." And so it—I mean, I was like, "Golly, this—this is cool." And there were some coaches involved, a guy named David Sparkman was one of our coaches, and he took four of us up to —to Dallas my freshman year and we went to State Conference. I met all these kids from all around the state of Texas. And, you know, I was like, "Whoa, this is really cool." These are all athletes, and so many football players. And you know, I was seeing guys from places back in the day like Plano High School that was just—they were winning state championships and I was like, "Oh, this has gotta be like what heaven's like." And so, we were in a small breakout room and uh, talking about stuff and I made some comments. And this coach came over, I didn't know who the guy was. After we got done, he's a big guy. He was jacked up. And he like pulled me aside and he said, "Let me tell you something: because of the way the things that you said and your stature," he goes, "you know, people hear you." He said, "You need to make sure you're saying the right things and you've got a platform." And I was like, "Man." And that—that carried a lot of weight and that meant something to me. And so through high school, you know, I was—I was trying to uh, I really—and like I said, I wasn't going to church. I didn't have a fa—I didn't have a foundation other than that what my grandmother gave me. I didn't have like—I had unbelievable loving, kind parents, but they were not, you know—we were John Wayne Christianity, that's what I've always called it. John Wayne Christianity to me is America, doing things the right way, don't cheat, lie, steal, and love God. Now, that doesn't mean go to

church, read your Bible, pray, fast; that doesn't mean those things. That's just put the flag outside and we love God. And so, we didn't go to church, occasionally. I didn't drive yet, so I was trying to do this Christian walk thing without a lot of the—the baton board—the—the foundation wasn't there. It was just kind of like I'd watch a little of this and see how they did it and then try to mimic it over here, you know. I—there was no foundation. And about that time, you know, you're discovering all these other things that are going on in high school, so I'm—I'm living two lives, you know. I'm living this really carnal life, that's, you know, girls and and all the things that go along with puberty and everything that, you know, this world…

STEWART: And being a rock star football player on top of it.

BILL: Well, and trying to be like this young man and then trying—you know, and then trying to be a football player, but then in the center I want to be godly, right? Well, something's got to give, and—and that's kind of where I was and uh, anyways. So, long story short—actually I'm—I'm always really good at long story long, sorry. But uh, my senior year, I tore my knee up in the summer, I had one knee surgery, cleared it up. I tore my knee up again during the season and uh, I went ahead and elected to have all the cartilage taken out so I could play the next week, because I didn't want to miss. I broke three vertebrae in my back. It was a rough year and uh, I had all these aspirations to go play college football and, you know, be the next Roger Staubach, as far—because I discovered, "Hey, he was big involved with FCA, man, I can be like Reggie White, I can be like Roger Staubach." I can be like these guys that are Christians and unbelievable football players. And so I—but when all that fell in on me and I didn't get the chance to—to play, I didn't know what to do with myself. I had no clue. And um, it was—it was a really, really, really tough time, like I say, I had no foundation. And to be honest, you know, if you say you work—you can tell where you worship by what you spend your time, your effort, your money. Well, I was spending my everything on football and and, you know, I had figured in my mind—I never would have said this out loud—but, "Man, God, you help me to be a great football player and I'm just going to—I'm going to lift up this platform." Yeah, God didn't really need me to do that, and as a matter of fact, I feel like, and I've always felt like, that he took that away from me to—to kind of bring me to a place, a "come to Jesus" moment. So, wasn't going to play football anymore, I was beat up, I had three surgeries in the year, and I'm going to—I don't know what—my—neither one of my parents went to college, so I just decided—I'd been working out with horses and all this stuff and I'd watch these vets come in and do these incredible like—guy had a tux on and delivers a foal and that was—and sews a—another horse's face up. So I was like, "I want to be a vet. I'm—I'm in." I love catching animals and like I said earlier, like always was messing with stuff and I love working with horses, so I'll just go to A&M, be a vet, and that'll be awesome. Like, I got to

A&M and it's like, "That ain't so awesome," because I had pretty much lost myself as far as uh, pursuing Christ. I had pretty much gone to college and it—been wheels off, for lack of a better term. Just lost myself. Uh, had no discipline, no plan, got caught up in all the things that you can get caught up in and… was like, "I—I don't—I don't want to do this." So, I called my dad, very frightening phone call, and I was like, "Dad…" and I—oh, so to go back, I didn't watch any football for two years. I didn't go to a game, I just…

STEWART: Oh, wow. You were done with it.

BILL: I was like heartbroken, like I was angry and and just—that was something that I had loved and worked so hard in and it was gone. I didn't know what to do with myself.

STEWART: Yeah.

BILL: So, you know, I told my dad, I was like, "Dad, you know, I think I might want to coach." And I was like ready for him to—and he said, "You know what, son, if I'd had the chance to go to college, that's what I always wanted to do was be a coach." So he was like, "Go do it. Go do it."

STEWART: And—and you—and you never knew that.

BILL: No, he had coached Little League and stuff like that…

STEWART: Oh, he did, okay.

BILL: He had helped me, but I never knew that he had—would have wanted to be a high school coach. He had never told me that.

STEWART: Isn't that cool?

BILL: And uh, I went and I called one of my old coaches—you know, I had a great—I had a great relationship with every coach I was ever around. I mean, I just loved them. I mean, they were great to me. And so I called one of my old coaches and he literally like chewed me out on the phone: "What are you doing?!" And then the very next week I got in the mail my Texas High School Coaches Association card, membership card. And he had signed me up to go to what we call coaches' school and it was in Houston that year. It's where every coach in the state of Texas we go before we start football season. And so, he brings me to coaches' school, he hands me off to one head coach, and then I got handed off to head coaches for like three days and they would just take me around and I got introduced to everybody. I got like, you know—I call it the Old Bulls Club. I sat there, I kept my mouth shut, I listened, and just got exposed—just drowned in all these coaches and they all were like so good to me. So from then on it was coaching. Alright, so and so I had all these biology credit hours, so I switched my degree over to kinesiology with an education, got out, took my test in history, took my test

in biology, health, PE, so I could teach. In the state of Texas you have to be a full-time teacher in order to coach in public school, so I got all my stuff and then, you know, got out and called my old head coach and I was like, “Hey, do you have any openings?” and he—he hired me right off. So, I was right back where I had been in high school and was having this opportunity to go out there and, you know, and I was blessed in a lot of ways. Like he instantly made me a varsity position coach instead of making me a junior high or freshman coach. I got to come in and I was a varsity defensive ends coach my very first year and I didn’t know anything, but I acted like I did. But I got that opportunity and—my old head coach hired me, and so that’s where it all started for me.

STEWART: Were you a DN? Is that what you did?

BILL: I was a center on offense. I’d been a fullback and then as I got bigger they said, “You’re an O-lineman.” And then I’d been a defensive end for two years, and then they built a new school and I had to go to the new school. And so, I’d been a defensive end and then when I got to the new school I was like, “Coach, I really want to play linebacker. Can I play middle linebacker?” You know, because Dick Butkus, I want to be—I want to be a middle linebacker. And he was like, “Well, alright, we’ll give it a shot.” So, that’s where—when I got to be there, like, I loved it. That was like my very favorite —my—my senior year I got to be like first team all-greater Houston and got those kind of things and and got to go on some college visits and do that stuff. So, I loved playing in there. It was fun.

STEWART: And did you—you were a big middle linebacker though, yeah?

BILL: Yeah, in high school. I’m about the same—I’m a little heavier now, but I graduated high school like at 6’1, 225.

STEWART: Wow, yeah. Uh, you’d have started at our high school, I can tell you that. Um, so uh, there’s another part of your story that’s very interesting to me. You are a head coach and you build a brand-new program at a place called Vista Ridge.

BILL: Yeah.

STEWART: And then at some point you decide—and like, I’m learning along with our audience here, Bill, you and I have never had these conversations—but you decide and like, this is like—I would do this. Like, you go, “I’m done with coaching,” and that’s that. So, talk to me about that point of your life.

BILL: So, let me take a step back. So, the very first year I coached, and then —then something fell through with my teaching and I had to go to another school, and it wasn’t a good situation. And I was like, “Man, this is not working out. This is not what I imagined.” And so, I was like, “You know,

maybe I'm in the wrong place." Prayed, you know, at this stage because my wife—okay, let's give my wife some credit. My wife saved my tail. When I met her, the night I met her, I told her I was going to marry her.

STEWART: Wow.

BILL: And I had barely even had a—up to that stage I'd barely even had a girlfriend that I could stay with for more than a month. So, the night I met Jody I said, "Jody, I'm going to marry you. You can either spend a lot of years with somebody you love or you can spend a lot of years with somebody you don't love or like, but we're getting married." And she was like, "Whatever, you're crazy." And there might have been some…

STEWART: What was it about her that made you say that? Because I mean, listen, like when people say that, like, a lot of times that's what happens. And like, you've been married to her for more than 30 years. I mean, I'm getting to her, but like what was it?

BILL: It was her spark, man. It was like she had a light about her. I'm going to—okay, here's the bad part. Okay, so we went to a wedding. My friends from high school were her friends in college, okay? And uh, I was told…

STEWART: And she's still talking to you. That—I mean, that's—that's good.

BILL: I was supposed to be there with another girl, she was supposed to be there with another guy. We're there and we danced, and that was the first thing. Man, I was like, "This girl can dance." Because I love to dance and I—and we were perfect together. She's tiny, but yet we were like perfect when we danced together and I was like, "This is awesome." So, after we danced for a while, she said, "Hey, I'm going to go up to my room and change my shoes." And I was like, "Alright." So I go up—now I'm a bad person in this stage of my life and I'm thinking, "Pfft, okay, let's go upstairs." I mean, so I go up to the room and I'm—I'm following her into her room at this hotel where she's getting her shoes, and she like turns around and stops me. And I wasn't used to that and I was like, "What's up?" And she's like, "I'm a Christian. I'm going in here to get my shoes. Wait outside. I'll be back in a minute."

STEWART: Wow.

BILL: I had never, ever, ever had anybody do that. I had never seen in years somebody… I mean, because like I said, I had kind of gone my own way. I didn't go to college—I didn't go to church in college. I felt like if I walked into the church, everybody would see me. They would know… I mean, church should be a place where the—where the lost go, where the broken go, right? But you don't feel like that when you're lost and broken. You feel like, "If I go in there, everybody's going to see me. They're going to know."

STEWART: That is—I am convinced that I sincerely believe that that one thing keeps a lot of people out of church.

BILL: Oh, it kept me out.

STEWART: Right.

BILL: I wanted to go.

STEWART: And it kept me out, too. It's like, "I'm not worthy of going in there. I'm not good enough to go in there." Like, people who are in there—like, if they knew what I was up to, they would not like me. And—and I mean, I think—I mean, to some extent, you know, it's—I don't know—I don't know when you stop feeling like that, but I think that's really—I think that's a keen observation. I really do. Sorry, go ahead.

BILL: No, man. Sorry. Because to me, like this is OG Pastors, that's huge. Because I—I mean, the thing that terrifies a person… I don't think it terrifies a person that God's not talking to, okay? And if God's not talking to you, if the Holy Spirit's not moving in your life, it doesn't scare you. You just don't want to go.

STEWART: Yeah.

BILL: You don't want to be there, you don't want to be a part of it.

STEWART: Yeah.

BILL: But when—when God's spirit is in you and you've broken—you broken fellowship, or if his spirit is drawing you and you haven't quite accepted Christ as your Lord, his conviction is pure, man. God's conviction is, like I said, he's hemmed me in, pursued me, like pulled me back. None shall be snatched from my hand. He was this to me all the time. I was this because I was scared of all those people, man. I was scared of what their opinions were, I was scared of them seeing me for the fraud that I am, right? I didn't—I didn't want to be around that. Because those were the—those were the good people, right?

STEWART: And it reminds—it reminds you—it can make you feel like you're a bad person.

BILL: Oh! And I was—and I was a bad person. I needed to be there. I need—and I needed someone to say, "Dude, you are bad. Come on in. Let's go. We gotta get you in here. We gotta get you right." You know, so anyways, but she put that hand in front and stopped me and I was like, "Man." Like that right there was probably—yes, she was gorgeous, yes, she had a great personality and could dance, but what she did in that moment, like, that like checked me. Like I was—Lord, this is something different. And so, we hung

out that night and sat down in the lobby in pre-cellphone, and I called my mom about 4 in the morning.

STEWART: Oh my goodness sake.

BILL: Yeah, I was like, “Hey, I’m safe. Everything’s fine. I’m sitting here with the girl I’m going to marry,” and she’s like, “Oh my gosh, you’re drunk,” and I go, “No, I’m good. I’m actually not.” And we were sitting down in the lobby talking till about 4 or 5 in the morning. Then I went home and and uh, we always joke, I said, “You left your stuff in my car,” like her lipstick and driver’s license and I was like, “You left that in my car on purpose, so I’d have to see you again no matter what,” and so…

STEWART: I agree with that assessment, Bill. I’m with you. I’ll go on this ride with you.

BILL: But that’s where all that, you know—golly, I started talking about her, I went back in time, I don’t remember what the original question was, but that—that was for me, her.

STEWART: What was it about her? That was—that was, yeah. So, I want to continue there, right? I want to continue because, like, advance the clock 30 years. You’ve together raised Taylor and Riley. Coaching can consume an enormous amount of time and energy and particularly here, results matter. And so, your family has been walking this journey alongside Coach Wilder. And I’m confident that—and I’ve never seen a coach that didn’t take some heat from whoever it was about whatever decision it was that you made about whatever it is and there’s plenty of people who are vocal about it, right?

BILL: Yeah.

STEWART: How do you think Jody and your girls have shaped—and you talked a little bit about this—but has shaped the man that you are today?

BILL: Oh man. Yeah. Well, when Taylor was born she was a preemie. And uh… I always struggle with this part.

STEWART: We’re with you, brother. Take your time.

BILL: And I don’t know why I struggle because it all worked out so good. But then God was faithful again. I mean, I had never been around a baby a day in my life. It was just—we had a very small family. No uncles, no aunts, no cousins, no nieces, no nothing. And when my daughter was born she was a preemie. And yeah, and she wasn’t breathing. She was just… like you see it on TV. I was expecting this baby to come out crying and kicking; there was no sound, there was no movement. And—and it was a real tough, tough, tough birth for Jody. She was wiped out. It was dead silent. So, I go to bed

about 2 o'clock in the morning. I get up at 4. I was sleeping on the floor and I go in to check in the—the little uh, incubator, where—wherever they keep all the babies, and she wasn't there. She wasn't there. She wasn't in the NICU yet. That was the thing: she wasn't in the NICU. So, I go through look through that glass and she's gone.

STEWART: Oh my goodness.

BILL: And I panic. I'm—I'm—I didn't know. Has she died? I didn't know. I didn't know the process. So, she's in NICU. And uh, oh my gosh. That next day, I could not speak. Could not—I could not make a word. I was just choked up. I could not even talk. I couldn't talk to my family, couldn't talk to Jody. It was like one day… I can't talk now. Oh, man. And just praying. I mean, what else do you have at that stage, right?

STEWART: Without a doubt.

BILL: So, I had—you got nothing. You got nothing. You're praying. You're just praying. You're repeating the same thing over and over again, because that's all you have and that's everything but that's it, you got nothing to bring. And that is Christianity to me: you got nothing to bring to the table and you're just asking for God's mercy. You know, so I go through that first day and then kind of bounce back the second day and start to find the baby's great. Taylor's in NICU, she's going all through the NICU things. But man, those ladies were unbelievable saints. Those were like angels. And uh, so, you know, "How's that shape you?" Well, that like breaks you down right there. And to see your wife like—she was just beat up. I mean, it was rough for her. Jody's parents had come in, my parent—my mother was there, my dad was there, my parents were living in Missouri at this time. So, my parents—my mom had to leave, my dad went with her. So I'm back in spring football. So Jody's spending the day in the hospital all day with Taylor in the NICU. I'm going to school, doing football, finishing football, going straight to the hospital, tagging her. They're going home to let her get some sleep and food. And I'm—and so, we would sit in the NICU and they would let you like hold them. And that's it. Man. And that is unbelievable. Yes, so for about, I don't know, almost three weeks, I'm just holding that baby. That's what I'm doing. Every ounce, you're watching every pound, every ounce, every color change, every struggle, every this. And you're just like, "Can we take her home?" "No, you can't take her home." Then you're crushed. "Can we take her home?" "Oh, she had a setback." And it was just over and over again. And so…

STEWART: How long—how long was she in—how long was she in NICU?

BILL: Like three weeks. So, three weeks of this. Yeah. Wow. Yeah. And we finally got to take her home and then after that she was—she was great. But

I think that that time, you know, I talked about like for me, losing football caused some chain reaction things in my life that broke me. This broke me. Jody putting her hand up in front—these are like moments, right, where I see like, “Man, God’s working.” I see God working in all these things. At the moment, you’re like terrified, but every single one of these was just him, you know, dropping the breadcrumb saying, “Come on, I got you. Stay in my lane.” So, that’s how they shaped me. And then we had our other daughter, uh, Riley. And, you know, we stayed down in Houston for a while and some things fell through—you talk about the criticism of being a coach, you know—Jody stopped working. She worked for FCA for a year and then she taught for a couple of years. We waited for about four years and then she was teaching. And then after we had Taylor, we said, “Let’s stay home. I want you to stay home.” She wanted to stay home. So we cut back everything. Uh, I brought a broke—I had to buy a truck out of the parking lot that was—somebody had parked there for about three months. I bought it for $600, got it running and that’s what I drove. Learned to cut my own hair. We had no money. And uh, again, though, God was faithful. And through this whole time because Jody had been really strong in her faith growing up—in college and growing up. We were back at church. We had—we were going to young adults. We went to every single in the summer—we had uh, coaches’ outreach uh, groups where we were meeting other coaches and their wives. We were going to FCA camps with kids. So we were like making God was a part of our ministry, our—you know, making sports a part of our ministry and God was like in our life. And so our kids, once we had them, they were going to FCA with us. They were just all a part of it. So this was our deal. I was at work, I’d come home, but my deal was when I came home I didn’t want anything else. It was just Jody and the girls, that’s it. So, I’m going to cook, clean, take care of babies, wash butts, wipe noses, you know. It was all about those babies and her, and that was it. And so those—those were the foundation of our, you know, marriage. And then one of our—something fell through with a—in Houston with a coach that I was working for and, you know, he lost his job. We went through the season and they—anyways, they were trying to angle for me to be the interim—the next coach, because it was my old high school. But I really wanted another guy that was older than me and I thought better qualified. And they went with somebody outside. So, didn’t have a job now, or wasn’t going to stay. I still had a job, but I wasn’t staying there. And the internet was kind of a brand-new thing to us. And so, I was searching jobs and I found one job on there and I just go, “Hmm. I don’t know anything about it.” Applied for it. Head coaching job. Didn’t know anything. Didn’t know anything. I had didn—I’d been a DC for about three years, defensive coordinator for about three years. And this is God: my old high school counselor was working for our school district, ran into the HR lady from the school district where I applied randomly at some fair—job fair. They got to talking. My old high school counselor got me an interview.

Went up there, did the interview. Jody was sitting there. It was supposed to be a 30-minute interview. Two hours later, she goes, “How’d it go?” and I go, “Oh, I got the job.” And then she goes, “You got the job?!” I said, “No, they didn’t tell me that, but I hope I get it.” We went home, waited two months, didn’t hear a word. Maybe it was a month and a half. Didn’t hear a word. She asked me—she hadn’t talked about it at all. I just assumed I didn’t get it. She was getting ready to go out the door to go jogging. She said, “Hey, what—have you heard anything back?” and I said, “Babe, if I haven’t heard anything by now, it’s not happening.” She walked out the door, I got a phone call: “We got a job for you. You’re going to be the head coach at Vista Ridge High School. Do you want it?” Wow. She’s out jogging, we had just—we hadn’t talked about it for since—since the day it happened. We had not talked about it. I told her it’s not going to happen. She walked out the door, phone rang and they offered me the job. Again, this is God just opening up doors. He’s opening up doors. And so, you assume when God opens up doors that you’re going to go somewhere, right? And it’s going to be like, I mean, amazing because he opened this door up for you, you’re going to go there and I mean, you’re going to light it on fire because, right? You know, and this was—I mean, obviously he wants you to go there so he’s going to make you very successful in what you’re doing, right? No. Again, God’s got different ways of teaching us and I think that uh, the struggle’s been his way of teaching me. So, when I went there, there was a lot of great things but there was a lot of struggle, lot of struggle. And I got sideways with somebody because I was told to fire my offensive coordinator and defensive coordinator and I wouldn’t do it. So, I got called insubordinate and those two men were both much older than me and they were amazing. I mean, and one of them is an outstanding Christian that I would always try to model myself after and I was told to fire that guy. I was also told I have too many FCA guys on my staff because I was trying to…

STEWART: Can you just tell us for those who might not know, just what is FCA?

BILL: Fellowship of Christian Athletes, I’m sorry. Yeah. I’ve said it many times. Yeah, Fellowship of Christian Athletes. And so, I was trying to hire coaches that faith and athletics work together, you know, that—that we could work in these young kids’ lives and be an example to them and bring Christ to kids in public school through our sports. And so, anyways, that’s when I decided at that point—I didn’t even tell my wife—I just said, “Hey, I resigned today.” And I got out and I was going to—my buddy got me a job being a salesman and I realized very quickly, much like vet school—didn’t take me two years, though—I am not a salesman. I was—I was like, “This is not something I’m going to be good at.” And so, um, a job was up the road at Georgetown coaching linebackers. Not a position—not being a coordinator, not a head coach—go in, be a position coach, learn to do what you’re told

again instead of telling other people, you know. And so I went and I loved it. It was great and uh, um, got me back into coaching, got me breathing again, and uh, kind of got me excited. And then a coach that had worked with me at Vista Ridge got the head job at Fredericksburg.

STEWART: Yeah, this is what I was going to tell you, this is—this is where I was headed. So in 2011, yeah, this is—the road brings you here, Fredericksburg, Texas. And you arrive as a defensive coordinator, which is in football parlance, a DC. Your family puts down roots and this becomes your home. What was it about Fredericksburg, the school, the program, the people, the person you just referenced? What brought you to Fredericksburg?

BILL: We had been through Fredericksburg several times when we used to do Coaches' Outreach, which is a ministry for coaches. During the year we do Bible studies every week. We have a lay minister that comes into the school and we do Bible studies. And uh, we do it all spring long for 14 weeks and we do it all fall long for 14 weeks. And so in the summers, one of their big ministries is they take coaches and their wives and they get them off, they take them somewhere nice, you—you know, they make it affordable through donations so that you can go take your wife to do something nice that as a coach you may not get to do regularly, but then they do ministry the whole time you're there. You get to visit other couples. So, we had been doing that and they'd had one down in Kerrville that we'd gone to for I think three years. And so, one of the days we'd come up to Fredericksburg, and it was just like this great little town and we thought, "One day we're driving through and wouldn't it be awesome to be able to come to a place like this and get out of the city?" Because I—I'm—I'm not really big into the city. And so, when Coach Lance Moffett was the guy that was the head coach here—Coach Moffett got the job—or was interviewing for the job—and he called me and said, "Hey, if I got this job, would you be willing to come to Fredericksburg?" and I was like, "Absolutely." I had a third-grader and I had a sixth-grader and uh, the chance to let them grow up in a small town I thought would afford them the opportunity to do different things that they might want to do that when you're in a big, big school, you only—you get to choose one thing, you know, maybe two things, because there's so much competition. And just getting them out of that, the environment, just—I—I felt like it would be way more wholesome just to get away from the city. So, when he did get the job, I accepted it and once again, I forgot to mention it to my wife and she was like, "We're doing what?!" I was like, "Well, you know, it's going to be great." Forgot to mention it, okay, alright. Yeah. And I did mention—I did tell her this: this is bad too—I do a lot of bad things—but I was like, "I'm sure that Kerrville's got like a Target and a Chick-fil-A." They didn't have either one. At that—we got a Chick-fil-A now, we're still missing a Target. So, but yeah, so in 2011 we moved here and the girls were young

and Jody got a job at the uh, elementary school. She had been a PE teacher where she was and had to go back into the classroom as a second-grade teacher. She, you know, really missed doing the PE, she loves that. And she had been doing the cheerleaders at Vista Ridge so she gave that up when she came here. So, it was a big transition. And uh, so many things again had to fall into place for that all to happen. We were upside-down in our house that we had just built and didn't know how we were ever going to even find a place to rent. And there was a coach here that had a place and he unbelievably generously made the rent affordable to us. And then I was able to rent our house to a coach back in uh, uh, Cedar Park, Leander until, you know, for the—like five years. And then when we finally were able to sell it, we were able to, you know, make some money in order to buy a home here. And so, we've been in our home now going on 11 years, so this will be our 16th year in uh, 16th season starting in Fredericksburg. Yeah.

STEWART: Wow. Alright, so how old—just real quick, I've—I can't do the math—how old are your kids now?

BILL: Taylor's 26, she got married July 25th, this past July 25th.

STEWART: Oh, yeah, that's right, okay, okay. So, you just—you were just there.

BILL: I was just there. Yes. She was just—so we started football on August 3rd, she was going to have the wedding on August 1st, and I was like, "Babe, I'm sorry, I guess I can't go to your wedding because I got football starting on Monday." So, she backed it up to August 25th, so anyway. So, yeah, so I was—we just finished their wedding up, got back here, jumped into football and uh, Riley's 24 years old and she's down in San Marcos. So.

STEWART: So, you've coached young men for 31 years and eventually every one of them plays his last football game, the helmet comes off, the uniform is handed back, the scoreboard's dark, and the rest of that person's life begins. And as a former professor, I don't know about you but like, there are certain kids that walk out the door that I go, "I'm really going to miss that kid." You know? It's like, it's like, "Man, I've spent the last four years with you and I've seen you blossom in such a big way." And—and then they go. And you really hope the best for them, right? You really do. And I—I don't want to put words in your mouth here, but I'm sure that you have players that don't have a similar upbringing as your own. Um, so when your player leaves the program, what kind of a young man do you hope is walking out that door?

BILL: In general, you want a young man who can handle adversity, that's resilient, that's moral, that understands the concepts of hard work. But then we're constantly dropping seeds. And you're hoping that that young man's

also—some of those seeds maybe have taken somewhere, that he heard something or something stuck to him or or during Bible study or in a prayer in a one-on-one time that, you know, that's up to God. But you're hoping and you're praying that some of those seeds bring about transformation. And there was one young man—I mean, there's so many kids that I like absolutely like love. I mean, like love. And golly, I've had so many incredible kids. I've been to—got to go to their weddings, I've gotten to do some of their weddings uh, in in uh, just like great kids that I absolutely love. But there was one young man, different world, right? No father, single mom, rough situation. He was drinking, doing drugs, sophomore in high school. Mom comes to us and says, "Hey, we—I'm going to take him out of football, I'm going to take him a—you know, he ain't…" And our head coach, Tom Henderson, said, "Don't take him away from us. If you take him away from us, we have no influence on him. Let us have him—we got out of school at 2:30—let us have him till 5:30. We'll fill that gap of time." So, this young man, gifted athlete, gifted athlete, and he started coming to Fellowship of Christian Athletes in the morning. We started talking about things. We started having interactions. We were close. I mean, I've almost killed him a hundred times and I always used to say, "I'm going to kill you and tell your mama it's an accident," but it was all in good love because I mean, he was bigger than me, he'd kill me. So, but uh, one day before a game, we're getting on the bus and kids are walking out the door and this kid comes up to me, he goes, "Coach, I gotta accept Jesus right now." And I was like, "You gotta accept Jesus right now?" He said, "I gotta do it right now, Coach." We had been talking about it. And I was like, "Okay." Wow. So we slipped off and we went into the helmet room, equipment room, and got down on our knee and prayed. And I don't know how long we prayed and everything, but he accepted Christ as his Lord and Savior and you know, we're in there hugging and we're at the—on the mountaintop and and I love this kid and walked out and the head coach is just looking and he is like on fire because he doesn't know. And he is a strong Christian believer, too, but at this stage he doesn't know. And he's like looks at him, he goes, "Get on the bus," and he looks at me and says, "Get on the bus!" and I was, "Get on the bus." So I told him about what happened so the next day when we were meeting, you know, he comes in the office and we're talking about stuff and he goes, "And if anybody is going to accept Jesus, could we just do it at least a little bit 30 minutes before the game or 30 minutes after the game from here on?" I was like, "Yes sir, okay." But that young man has uh, grew up out of a rough situation, went on, played Division 1 college football, got his degree, went and played uh, international rugby, was very successful in that, has been married now for over 20 years, has had has two boys, one of his sons is going on to play college football and so this kid who grew up without a dad, you know, has turned into this incredible husband and dad and a man of faith and is now investing himself in his own sons. And in all those other

young men that are going to see him, are going to see this guy: “This guy loves his wife, loves his kids, and has done the right thing.” So, that’s what you want. And I’ve got other kids, you know, that have gone on and just done incredible things and—and you get to see them. And but one of the things I love about being in this small town is like right now, a kid that played for me back in 2011 and 12, he’s working on my house. He’s the contractor working on our house. Other kids that maybe some didn’t even play for me, they were just kids that I had in class or kids that maybe even got in trouble with me, they’ve been the guys that have come to our house and worked on our house and done our electrical and done our plumbing and and in the that—we’ve got one young man that I’ve gone and see, he’s a Green Beret, and then you see other kids that they’re just doing great, I mean, in whatever field they’re in, and they’re being family men and they’re—you see them at church. And so, I get to see these kids that were young, now they’ve grown up, now they’re young men and you get to see where their life is going and many of them, golly, you’re like, “Man, Lord, you have, like, that kid is an exemplary young man in so many ways.” And just—I—by far and away, I think I’ve seen way more—I’ve seen some tragic things, I’ve seen some bad, bad things and some tragic kids, that—that’s going to happen, too, but man, the memories of so many kids like being outstanding is far outweighs the other.

STEWART: It’s funny you say that because you’ve changed the trajectory of a lot of kids’ lives. I say that with 100 percent confidence. And I’ve done a podcast—I—I mean mentioned I’ve done one called “Kids These Days.” Whenever somebody says to me, “Kids these days,” I just stop listening, because I was so fortunate to have a number of really terrific kids. And one of the people that was really a good friend and we collaborated together on various player situations was Coach Catanzaro—Jim Catanzaro at—at Lake Forest College. Uh, everybody knows him as Coach Cat, but he—he has changed a lot of lives. And we have a very successful guy named TC Wilson in my—in my industrial life who talked about how much his college football coach meant to him. And so, you know, my hats off to you as—as far as, like, if that woman would have pulled that young man out of football, like, it’s not guaranteed that it wouldn’t have happened, but I think the chances were substantially better with the work that you’ve done. One of the things that you get out of uh, having a local celebrity on a podcast is that there are a lot of local folks who are going to listen to this. And a lot and a lot of people know you in town. And you cannot be—I don’t know if this is true, you can correct me if I’m wrong—but it is not—15 years coaching at one place is a lengthy track record. And people, you—they gotta love you because it’s, you know, you bring the right message, right? But there’s other people here, adults, members of our church, and students of of Fredericksburg High School who aren’t involved in football in any way that are going to listen to

this solely because it's you. If you could bring all of them—all those young people—into the room with us right now and you had a few uninterrupted message—of a—uninterrupted minutes with them, what would you want them to know?

BILL: I mean, I would want a kid to know that you were made for a purpose, that you were made by God for a purpose. And that purpose is to worship God. He made you to worship him. He made you to be something that honors his being, that honors him. And when you do that, you bring out the best that you have. The best of you comes out when you bring that to God. I would want them to know that you're going to struggle and you're going to fail and you're going to mess up and you are going to um, make mistakes that you think are going to—that are un—you're unable to come back from. And I'd want them to know that that's not true. I'd want a kid to know that your mistakes don't define you, your bad choices are not who you are, that um, you know, learning to say "I'm sorry," learning to be humble and seek forgiveness, like to seek it out, not just hope it works out, but to seek forgiveness and to give forgiveness are massively powerful. That uh, it's funny today: I was talking with a young man and the conviction is at one point I was frustrated and angry and at the next point I'm like, "Man, I just want this kid to be on a right path again." You know, I mean that's—it's like being a parent for your entire career. That's—that's what coaching and teaching is like: you never stop being the parent when your kids were little, you know, and you were kind of, "Ah!" and you're frustrated and then you comes back down, you're like, "Man, I just love this kid, I just want them to get right." So, I guess that would be the message. I mean, I would—I think that everything has to come all through the Lord. And in—and I think that at the same time as that comes through you that um, I'd want them to know that, because I don't know that a lot of kids know. You know, I go to our church, how many—how many teenagers do you see in our church? I don't see many. I see a lot of parents bring their young, young kids, like I used to. Young kids. But I don't see a lot of teenagers. There's some of them in youth. And for as many people that are in our town and we're packed, but there's a lot of people that aren't there. So I don't—and I watch our kids in chapel and I ask them questions and so many of our young people are just like I was: they don't have a foundation. And so, you know, one of the things I've always—and I haven't figured out how I want to do it yet—but is I think that the thing that even once I was believing and I went off to college, like is discipleship. Like teach me how to be a man of God because I don't know how to do it. I don't know how to do this thing. Like all my body and my mind and temptations are telling me these things and my soul is convicted that these are the right things, but these look so fun. So how—how do I do this? How do I—how do I navigate this? And you know, and football's such a great analogy—I always think that—that pastors—OG Pastors—and coaches

are very similar. The pastor stands up there and he gives you the Word of God, he gives you the blueprint, he tells you how to do it, he explains what it means, he shows you what examples, right? And then he—he gives you all the tools and explains those tools and then tells you, “Okay, now your part is, here’s your weightlifting and here’s your conditioning: you have to pray, you have to be in constant prayer, you have to be reading scripture on your own, you have to be fasting, praise and worship, all these things. You have to develop—oh, this is the huge one—you have to develop discipline.” Because it’s not always, you know—the Bible says real clearly that when your own desires, right, your own desires, they’re the things that drag you down. You know, it tells us to throw off every hindrance and sin that entangles us and to run with perseverance the race set before us in the—you know, with the author and perfecter of our faith sitting at the right hand of God. So, that’s what we teach, right? We want to stack days in football, right? You gotta show up in the morning, you gotta lift, you gotta eat, you gotta stay hydrated, you gotta sleep, you gotta do this today, you gotta do it again tomorrow. Boom, start over again at zero. You gotta keep going. You stack days, stack days, stack days. And when you see a kid that believes in stacking days, they start off in offseason at 180 pounds, but they believed in it, right? So they did it—faith without action, right—they believed, so they did these things. And the next thing is that 180-pound kid, they come back at 205 pounds of muscle and they’re faster and they’re better because they believed and they put action to their faith and they had discipline. So, you ask me what I would want young people to know: that hey, you have to develop this, this discipline, this mentality of every day I’m a—I—I have—I’ve been saved because Christ loves me and gave himself for me, but now the expectation—the—that is done, but I—I didn’t get this part: I have to stack days. Yeah. That is the process of sanctification, right? Sanctification. That’s that stacking days constantly, letting that faith create work inside of you that transforms you into this person that God wants you to be, that you can be, but man, it takes faith and it takes effort and it takes work and… but it’s not about works. I mean, that’s not the thing. That’s what I… it’s not that you gotta be good, it’s that you want to be good. It’s that you want to be what God created you to be, which you can be. And that is that discipleship discipline part that as a young man I didn’t have and as an older man I struggle with. You know, those foundations that you lay when you’re young can just transform a life. And for so many people, it—it is just—it’s daily. You know, you slide, you slip, but you—you can look at somebody that—that’s carrying out what they believe. And so, that’s—that’s what we want to take from the football field, right? These are the things that make life, right? Even if you choose, you know—even if you’re not a believer, these are still the things, young man, to be a successful person. As a believer, if you confess to me that you’re a believer, then these are the things also that help you become the man that God created you to be: the husband that you want

to be, the guy that God created you to be, the father, the better son at home, the brother, the neighbor. So, I mean, all those things to me in some mysterious way work in—it's in all phases, but especially in athletics, and it's for me especially in football because football is such a—it takes so many different kinds of people to make a football team. Most other teams have got a lot—they're a lot more homogeneous when you look at a soccer field: they look—like all look like soccer players. And basketball guys look mostly like basketball guys. But on football, you have this wide variety of people with way different—way massively different body types, skill types, stereotypes, and getting them all to mesh together and understand that we have one purpose and this is how we achieve that purpose, to me that carries over into every single phase of life. Yeah. I mean, it's why people—I'm sure every coach feels that way about their game, too. But I mean, I, you know, I think it's one of the reasons that that finance loves—loves athletes, because that—that—that team—that team mentality. Yeah, absolutely. So, really inspirational and aspirational, too. I would think as a parent of a young man that it would be a blessing if they were led by you. And I know that you're not alone in your profession, but it is inspirational. I really appreciate you taking the time and thanks for being on, Bill.

BILL: Well, thank you for having me, man. This was such a privilege. I enjoyed it.

STEWART: I'm glad you did. We've been joined today by Bill Wilder, who's the head coach of the Fredericksburg Battlin' Billies. I'm Stew, also known as That Texas Podvangelist, and you can be, too, if you just tell one person about this podcast. Until next time, que Dios te bendiga. May God bless you and yours. We'll see you next time on the OG Pastors' Faith Over a Lifetime podcast.