



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** The Use and Abuse of Power - Part 1

**Guest(s):** Chuck Colson

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- Dr. Dobson: Well, hello everyone. I'm James Dobson, and you're listening to Family Talk, a listener-supported ministry. In fact, thank you so much for being part of that support for James Dobson Family Institute.
- Chuck Colson: I think the problem with power is one that affects everybody. I think it affects the shop steward who bullies his employees. I think it affects the mother who tries to dominate her children too much. I think it affects the businessman who is arrogant towards the people that he has under him. I think it affects the pastor who tries to play God. I think it affects every aspect of our lives. It is not just government officials.
- Roger Marsh: That was the late Chuck Colson, former special counsel to President Richard Nixon. He knew firsthand what it meant to have a problem with power and to abuse it. Although he was part of the Watergate Seven, Colson pleaded guilty to obstruction of justice in an unrelated case. He was sentenced to one to three years in jail and was released after having served seven months.
- Roger Marsh: After trusting Christ as his savior, Chuck founded Prison Fellowship on the conviction that all people are created in God's image, and that no life is beyond God's reach, including prisoners behind bars. For the balance of his life, Chuck Colson worked with prisons to facilitate evangelism events, Bible studies, discipleship courses, life skills classes, and mentorship and re-entry programs.
- Roger Marsh: Hello, and welcome to Family Talk, the listener-supported broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. You're about to hear part one of a very special edition of Family Talk. Did you know that the United States has about 4% of the world's population, but is responsible for 20% of the world's prison population? Nearly 2.2 million people are incarcerated in the U.S. right now, and more than 4.5 million more Americans are on probation or parole.
- Roger Marsh: These are sobering statistics, but there is some good news. Today, Prison Fellowship has grown into a ministry in all 50 states, featuring a staff of more than 268,000 volunteers. Now starting with his autobiographical books entitled, *Born Again* and *Life Sentence*, Chuck Colson authored 23 books, which sold five

million copies. Then amazingly, he donated all the royalties from those books to Prison Fellowship. Other titles include Kingdoms In Conflict, How Now Shall We Live? and The Good Life. In addition, he hosted the nationally syndicated radio broadcast Breakpoint and wrote regular columns for Christianity Today. On April 21, 2012, Chuck Colson went to be with the Lord at the age of 80.

Roger Marsh: Now that brings us back to our program today. Back in 1984, Dr. Dobson invited Chuck Colson to his office to glean godly wisdom from a fellow warrior for Christ. Chuck reaffirmed Dr. Dobson's commitment to stand up for righteousness in the culture, to never waver from it, and to do it with boldness. What started out as a day of discipleship from one of America's greatest Christian apologists blossomed into a decades-long friendship and an unexpected multiple day broadcast. They entitled it The Use And Abuse Of Power.

Roger Marsh: It's as relevant today, as it was the day they recorded this conversation. You are in for a true tour de force here on Family Talk, as we feature the first part of a three-part conversation that Chuck Colson had with Dr. Dobson back in 1984. So let's listen now to part one of a conversation we're calling The Use And Abuse Of Power here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Dr. Dobson: I don't think, Chuck, you need a lot of introduction, but you were special counsel to the president during the Nixon administration, got involved in the Watergate affair, and went to prison for that. I wonder how long are you going to be identified that way? Do you suppose the rest of your life, your introductions will start that way?

Chuck Colson: All of my life. Sure, the man who ran over his city, would run over his own grandmother, and who went to prison, the ex-convict.

Dr. Dobson: But the Lord really used that experience and from it has come your own prison ministry, so he has turned that tragedy to triumph, hasn't he?

Chuck Colson: Yes, I reflect back on that often, Jim. I think the lowest point in my life was the first night in prison. The stale odors, and the open urinals, and the desperate feeling, and the men crowded together, and the guard shining a flashlight in your eyes every two hours.

Chuck Colson: I recently gave my papers to Wheaton College. In the course of giving the papers, I went through them and read some of the things that I had written from prison, both once when I got a tape recorder in, which I wasn't supposed to have and dictated some impressions, and another time when I wrote a letter to my peer group. I relived the despair that I felt at that point in my life, the awful feeling of having your wallet taken away. I protested, I said, "Supposing I get out of here, nobody will identify me. I won't be able to identify myself." They said, "Don't worry, you're number 23226 and that's that." That awful sense of loss of your own personal identity.

Dr. Dobson: What a shock for a guy who just a few days before had been 10 feet from the president.

Chuck Colson: That's right, but a shock for anybody. You strip away anybody's humanity, you take away their identification, you take away their relationship with people on the outside, and you put them in a prison. That's that loss-ness, that after a period of time really begins to have its effect in terms of embittering people.

Chuck Colson: Anyway, I was reading those papers and reliving it and sort of in a cold sweat. Then I realized I was giving my papers to Wheaton College because Wheaton has set up an institute for ministry to prisoners, which is now significantly endowed, and there will be ministry going on in the prisons for generations until the Lord returns. It grew out of that lowest and most desperate point in my life. So you really do see the amazing way in which a sovereign God works often through the most desperate moments of our life. As a matter of fact, I think most frequently works through the most desperate moments around there.

Dr. Dobson: Well, that in fact is what I want to talk to you about today, that powerlessness, as opposed to having power, and what it does to people. But before I throw the first question at Chuck, I want to tell you what the last 14 hours have been like. Chuck did not come here to do a radio program. I asked him to come into the studio because our discussions have been so stimulating to me that I felt other people would benefit from it. But this was kind of a selfish thing. I invited Chuck here to just draw from what God has taught him and for the two of us to interact as brothers.

Dr. Dobson: This has been an absolutely incredible morning for me. Chuck and Patty, his wife, flew in last night, and Shirley and I went to dinner with them. That was a neat time together. Then we met together this morning. We've had our devotions together, and just been sharing our own views of what God is doing in our ministries, and the dangers that are implicit in public ministries, and how Satan can get us off the path. I just enjoyed those conversations so much, I asked Chuck to come on down to the studio and let's talk about some of it here. Let's get to it that issue.

Chuck Colson: I've enjoyed them just as much. It's been a great blessing to me to be with you, and to be with a brother who's we think alike on a lot of things, and I hope God is going to use our relationship one way or the other to help. It sure helps me, Jim.

Dr. Dobson: Well, there are times when you need to stop and take stock of where you are, especially in a fast moving, growing ministry like we're both experiencing. It can roll over you. You need to stop and bounce it off somebody else and say, "Now, wait a minute. Are we on track here?" This was just so meaningful to me in that context and it relates to what we want to talk about having to do with power.

Dr. Dobson: What, in your view, having sat next to the president, having known all the secrets of state that there are to know, having worked with the most powerful man on the face of the earth, what does it do to a human being to have that kind of power, as opposed to those who are totally powerless as you saw them in prison?

Chuck Colson: Well, you see, you're going to approach that question from several different perspectives. The first perspective is that as a young political idealist, having worked in politics, and government, and in and out of campaigns all of my life, to arrive in the White House, and to have the band playing Hail To The Chief, and to the flags furling, and to the crowds cheering, and people around saying "Yes, sir, no, sir." Nobody ever says, "No, sir." They always say, "Yes, sir."

Chuck Colson: An aide outside your door at all time, the ability to pick up a telephone and have a four engine jet waiting at Andrews Air Force Base, to generals and admirals saluting. The aura of power, the trappings of power are inherently corrupting. I went in there determined. At great sacrifice, I'd left a very successful law practice, lucrative law practice, determined to pass laws, to change things in the country, to bring my political views to bear.

Dr. Dobson: You were not a Christian at that time? We need to stress it.

Chuck Colson: I was not a Christian, but I went out of a sense of duty. I now look back and realize how that aura of power that surrounded us began to warp your views. You began to feel you were a little bit above the law. You began to feel that you could do almost anything because your goals were so noble. As a matter of fact, self-righteousness was for me a real problem.

Chuck Colson: I think we have to understand there's a great adage of Plato when he said, "Only those who do not seek power are fit to hold it." The seeking of power in and of itself is corrupting just by the nature of it, just by the sinful nature of those of us who are part of the human race. It does this to us and you have to really fight against it. You got to really wrestle with it daily.

Chuck Colson: Paul said, "I die daily." Paul had a big ego. Paul was a prideful man. Paul had good reason to be. Look at all the things he'd accomplished in his life. Then he had this extraordinary experience with Christ and met him personally, was taught by him personally. Because of that, he said, "I have to die daily."

Chuck Colson: Now that's looking at power in one dimension, that's looking at what the aura or the trappings of power do to people. There's another dimension to power that I think is really pertinent to the times in which we live. That is that there is the aura, or the appearance of power, or the illusion of power, but it isn't real power.

Chuck Colson: One of the things that led to my conversion was when I walked out of the White House, I realized that most of the problems I worked on when I started in

government were worse when I left than when I began. I realized that while I thought I was influencing things, most of the battles that I fought were with the Congress over who would have control over a particular program or what we were going to put in the budget.

Chuck Colson: I realized that the power of government is vastly overrated. It led to sort of an emptiness in my own life because I was thinking, "I've devoted my life to this and it really hasn't mattered all that much." That was one of things God used to begin to soften my heart to look for the real values of life, which is the power of the King of Kings living in us, the eternal values of God, which is so transcendent to the momentary battles and power struggles of man.

Chuck Colson: Jacques Ellul, a French theologian and historian, who's written some marvelous books. One of them, the Presence of the Kingdom, which is a powerful book about Christian living in society today. He wrote a book prophetic for our times. It is entitled The Political Illusion. Ellul's thesis is that politicians let people think, make people think that they have all the power and that they can solve all their problems because that's how they acquire more power and more power.

Chuck Colson: Then in the age of the media, the media plays the game with them because the media can focus on government and make it appear that government has all power. That sells newspapers and gets people to watch television, and of course, the media gains power as a result.

Dr. Dobson: By association.

Chuck Colson: Sure, and profits, because in this country at least, they're private enterprises. So there's this vicious circle. It begins with a politician saying, "We can solve all your problems." Then people are lulled into this belief, a political illusion, and they begin to do nothing. Ellul's fundamental thesis is that the only thing that stands between man and totalitarianism are private voluntary associations. It's only when people get together and do things as people, and when they get involved in their community, when they begin to help people.

Chuck Colson: Now he writes as an evangelical Christian, but what he is saying is that the defense in this media age, in which we begin to build our trust and faith in institutions, the only defense against that is private voluntary action. That's what so excites me about the ministry I'm in because it gets people, lay people involved doing something with their Christian faith, and it shatters the political illusion.

Chuck Colson: We Christians, in particular, have got to look at things right now in perspective. It's very important we register and vote and get into politics, but don't do it with the illusion that government is going to solve all of our problems. We're going to win some battles there, but the kingdom of God, the battle for the kingdom of God goes on in the hearts of man.

Dr. Dobson: This subject absolutely fascinates me because it's very much related to the profession that I've chosen. I see it in newborns. Research is pretty clear on this that the first day home, the first day after birth, a child reaches out for the manipulation and the control of the adults that are around him, the very first day. Every mother knows this, but it took the researchers all these years to come up with it.

Dr. Dobson: But there is a desire for power, power being defined as the ability to control yourself, your circumstances, and other people built into human nature. The interesting thing is that the more you get, the more you want. It is never satiated.

Dr. Dobson: You and I were talking earlier today about the physicians that I worked with in the medical school, who had incredible power, that patients worshiped them. Their reputations were worldwide. The money that they had, the status that they had was almost unlimited. And yet, instead of satisfying those inward needs, the ego needs, instead of finding themselves, their egos became more infantile, and their demands more incredible. Power does that to you. It's insatiable. It's not like a good meal that's been fixed, and you eat it, and for a while, you're not hungry anymore, but it's just a bottomless well.

Chuck Colson: Well, power is destructive in the sense that the more you have, the more you have to have. Of course, that's what leads people to start out often with relatively noble motives, but then the constant desire for more power, for more adulation, for more ego stroking leads them to more and more extreme measures. That's how you see empires degenerate.

Dr. Dobson: Was that the downfall of the Nixon administration?

Chuck Colson: In part it was because we were in a constant battle for power against the press and the Congress, and particularly against the press. We had declared war, and they saw us gaining power over them, and we saw them getting power over us. Agnew declared war on the media and they weren't going to be satisfied until they had wiped us out. It was a giant power struggle and we lost.

Chuck Colson: But I think the problem with power is one that affects everybody. I think it affects the shop steward who bullies his employees. I think it affects the mother who tries to dominate her children too much. I think it affects the businessman who is arrogant towards the people that he has under him. I think it affects the pastor who tries to play God. I think it affects every aspect of our lives. It is not just government officials. When you look at power, don't sit back, folks who are listening on the radio, and say, "Well, that doesn't involve me." It sure does involve you.

Dr. Dobson: It involves you and me, Chuck in visible public ministries like we're in. What are the dangers to us?

Chuck Colson: We're in, I guess, as dangerous a position as anybody can be in. After the National Religious Broadcasters, there was a press conference. I had a press conference because I'd given the opening night address. There was a man from a secular newspaper sitting in the front row. The first question he said, "Mr. Colson, aren't born-again Christians supposed to be loving and caring for one another?"

Chuck Colson: I said, "Yes." "Compassionate for the world?" he said. And I said, "Absolutely." He said, "Well, I don't understand. I've walked around these exhibits here at this convention. Seems to me, the bigger, the exhibit, the more arrogant the person who's manning the exhibit."

Chuck Colson: I defended my brethren and I said, "Look, they've gotten into this business because it's a ministry. It's God's calling. Many of them started on a shoestring and they're building up their ministries and they're proud of it. That's an understandable human reaction."

Chuck Colson: Then he began to describe the various things that different people had said to him at the different exhibits. I was again defending my brethren, but at the same time I was cringing inside because I knew exactly what he was talking about.

Chuck Colson: It was interesting after the press conference, I went over, and I talked to him and I said, "Look, don't judge all Christians by some of us who can't handle power, any more than I will judge all people in the media by some of the things that you folks do."

Chuck Colson: He said to me, "I'm a recovering alcoholic, Mr. Colson. I really was asking those questions because I'm searching. I run into an awful arrogance among people in Christian ministry," and he's right. The idea of reaching into millions of homes, as we're doing right now, is a very awesome thing. Running big ministries, and particularly for people who know what Christ teaches, and suddenly we have all this power.

Chuck Colson: I wrestle with it. I have a terrible time. Pride was my sin. Pride was what drove me all my life. The most deceitful thing is man's own heart. So I'm not sure I can ever be honest with myself. I try to be. I asked my friends to be honest. I read all the critical mail that comes to our ministry. I can't read all the mail that comes in, but any letter of criticism has to come to me. I want people to tell me, I ask them to, I go out of my way looking for them to tell me because I know I won't see it in myself.

Chuck Colson: I know it was the deadly snare of my life when I was in politics. I'm scared of it, but I believe this is God's calling. I got to sort of like Jonah be the reluctant prophet who goes and does what God calls, hoping and praying I can forestall the inevitability of my own pride and ego getting in the way.

Chuck Colson: The only way I'm able to deal with that is to get out of the public light for a while. I just have to go off for a couple of weeks, and study, and read, and not get that. I don't ever walk on an airplane, or into a airplane terminal, or a restaurant, invariably people will come and talk to me. It's always very nice and it's wonderful, but I fight this.

Dr. Dobson: That's power.

Chuck Colson: That's power. It sure is. It's inevitable in some senses, and we have to deal with it. Everybody has to deal with it in their lives. Everybody has power. A parent has power over his children. The question is how you deal with that. Power is not inherently evil.

Dr. Dobson: It's what it does to you.

Chuck Colson: It's what it does to you. Power is inherently corrupting, but not inherently evil. Power comes from God. The paradox, of course, is the more you get rid of it, the more you have. The more you give it away. I look at Mother Teresa. I received a letter from her, as I was telling you last night, Jim. I was terribly impressed that she had taken time to handwrite a letter until I inquired and found out that she doesn't have a typewriter, that any letter that she sends, she handwrites. She has no power in the sense that she doesn't have computers and buildings and-

Dr. Dobson: No organization.

Chuck Colson: ... budgets, and baptisms, and buses and all the signs of Christian success. But she has enormous authority. It's an authority that she has earned by virtue of serving others, a little bit of what we were talking about earlier. She has come to know God in a way that is a very intimate fellowship by sharing in the suffering of people around it. Now this has given her authority, no power, no money.

Chuck Colson: When the Pope was in India and left his automobile with her, a white limousine as a gift to Mother Teresa, she accepted it graciously. She didn't come up with any false humility and she didn't embarrass the Pope. She simply took the car, and then auctioned it off, and sold it, and put the money into the proceeds, put the proceeds into her work.

Chuck Colson: She would be a classic illustration to me of authority, which God invests in us by virtue of faithful service and obedience, which can be 100 times more influential than the use of raw or naked power, which depends upon force. You see, authority always has a moral foundation, which power may not.

Dr. Dobson: Talk a little bit about the power that comes from the media. Are we out of harmony with him in making use of electronic avenues that are available to us to communicate today?



Chuck Colson: Oh no, I will often find people that say, "Well, if you really want to be biblical, you've got to do exactly what Paul did." That is you take sailing ships, and you walk over land, and you carry all your possessions on your back because Paul did it. Well, that's absurd. Paul used the resources that were available to him in the culture and the technology at the time. We're supposed to do exactly the same thing and certainly not wrong to use it.

Dr. Dobson: But you do feel it's not being used right in many contexts?

Chuck Colson: I've been very critical of much of religious broadcasting in America today, particularly Christian television, which I think is pandering to the egocentric nature of American culture. I think what we're really saying to much of the world in a form of pop Christianity is so you really want to get your own thing, and do your own thing, and you really want to succeed, and you really want to win, and you really want to gratify yourself.

Chuck Colson: "Well, we Christians have got a better formula than you secular people. We've got God on our side. If you pray to God, he's going to solve your financial problems. If you pray to God, he's going to bless your life abundantly. Look at us in this gorgeous, attractive, multi-million dollar studio. See how God blesses us. You can know God and be blessed too." Now that's cheap grace.

Chuck Colson: I picked up a newspaper recently and it captured it all. It was a thought for a day from a prominent Christian pastor. Up the top of the page, they always have a thought for the day every day, some quote that the editors choose. This one they chose from a pastor who will remain unnamed. It said, "Put God to work for you in this divinely ordered capitalist system."

Chuck Colson: See that isn't just bad theology because God was not created for man's pleasure. Man was created for God's pleasure. It's not just bad theology. It's heresy. It is an appeal, not even a subtle appeal to the egocentric, materialistic nature of man.

Chuck Colson: We call people to come to Christ, not because there's something in it for them, but because Jesus Christ is truth. He is God incarnate. It is the plan of creation embodied in the person of Christ. That's why you come to Christ. You come to Christ whether it is going to mean that you're going to prosper and have two cars and a nice home, or whether you lose your life. But you come to Christ because it's true.

Chuck Colson: We sell a cheap grace, as Bonhoeffer called it, on much religious broadcasting. I addressed the National Religious Broadcasters and told them so. It was a sobering experience for the first 15 minutes of my speech-

Dr. Dobson: Dead silence

Chuck Colson: ... but then there were little ripples of applause, and I think people began to understand what I was saying. I said, "If we dare to speak for God, if we dare to speak for a Holy God, then we have an awesome responsibility to present the whole truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ." The bad news of the conviction of sin before the good news of the redemption. The fact that Christ is calling us to be obedient to live as Christians in a world where it may cause us to be persecuted and suffer and be ridiculed. It is not simply a religious adaptation of the me too, give me everything I can get secular world. If we make it that, we're one day be called to account, if not by the disillusioned masses we have led into this false Christianity, then surely by the sovereign God we believe in.

Dr. Dobson: Chuck, can we carry this on next time?

Chuck Colson: I'd love to.

Roger Marsh: You're listening to Chuck Colson, special counsel to President Richard Nixon and founder of Prison Fellowship here on Family Talk. That was part one of a completely spontaneous three-part conversation with Dr. Dobson entitled The Use and Abuse of Power. God used the one thing in Chuck Colson's life that he couldn't brag about, his prison sentence for abuse of power, to draw him into a relationship with Jesus Christ. Plus his seven months behind bars planted the seeds for the international ministry now known as Prison Fellowship.

Roger Marsh: Hearing this testimony. I'm reminded of the words of the apostle Paul in Second Corinthians 12:9. He's taken his issue of the thorn in the flesh before the Lord and the Lord responds to him by saying, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Roger Marsh: In prison, god gave Chuck Colson a lesson in what really matters and it's not earthly power. I love how he put it. It's the power of the King of Kings living in us, the eternal values of God, which are so transcendent.

Roger Marsh: Now to learn more about the late Chuck Colson and the ministry of Prison Fellowship, visit our broadcast page at [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org). While you're there, if you missed any portion of this broadcast or you want to review it again, you'll hear that there as well. [drjamesdobson.org/broadcast](http://drjamesdobson.org/broadcast). Remember to join us again tomorrow for part two of Chuck Colson's fascinating conversation with Dr. Dobson entitled The Use and Abuse of Power. For everyone on the team here at Family Talk, I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks for joining us today.

Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.