



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** The Use and Abuse of Power - Part 3

**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.
- Roger Marsh: Hello everyone. I'm Roger Marsh and you are listening to Family Talk. The listener supported broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. On today's program, you're going to hear the final installment of our three-part series called, The Use and Abuse of Power, featuring the late Chuck Colson.
- Roger Marsh: Now, this conversation between Chuck and Dr. Dobson actually took place nearly 40 years ago. In 1974, Chuck Colson served seven months in jail for obstructing justice as President Richard Nixon's self-described hatchet man. Before this, during the time he was being investigated for his involvement in the Watergate scandal, Chuck was radically saved by Jesus Christ. Now some have compared his conversion to the salvations of John Newton or Saint Augustan or the Apostle Paul. Chuck Colson was literally transformed from a reprobate sinner to a faithful servant.
- Roger Marsh: Upon his release from prison, Chuck Colson wrote his autobiography entitled, Born Again. And with the proceeds from that book, he started Prison Fellowship Ministries, answering God's call on his life to empower the powerless. He wanted to see prisoners delivered from darkness into the glorious light of the gospel.
- Roger Marsh: I had the privilege of working for Chuck Colson at Prison Fellowship Ministries in the mid and late 1990s, as part of his Break Point radio ministry. He was a true mentor for me and for many others, as well. It was a very sad day in April of 2012, when we heard the news that Chuck Colson had passed away. Fortunately, his legacy is still evident in the countless lives he touched through his books, ministry and his personal relationships.
- Roger Marsh: Let's listen now to the conclusion of Dr. James Dobson's conversation with the late Chuck Colson on today's edition of Family Talk.

Dr. Dobson: Before we went on the air, you were telling me about your visit to the prison. Was it in Lima, Peru?

Chuck Colson: Lima, Peru, the Lurigancho prison, which is-

Dr. Dobson: Share that story.

Chuck Colson: Well, it's reputed to be the worst prison in the world and I think it deserves that reputation. It was just an incredible experience. We drove out of Lima and the head of our ministry in Peru was a born again Catholic. He's a marvelous man. Emmanuel, he was driving the car over this dusty road out in the dust bowl about 20 miles outside of Lima on our way to the prison. About 55 miles an hour in his old Mercedes, beaten up car. I looked out to the side and I saw a group of campesinas walking along the road, carrying everything they owned in little satchels over their shoulders. I turned to Emmanuel and I said, "Emmanuel, stop quick," because I'd seen a woman's face in the midst of the campesinas. I said, "Stop, there's a nun there."

Chuck Colson: And he started laughing. He said, "There's no nuns out here." He said they'd been banned. A few weeks earlier a nun had been murdered in the prison and the Council of Bishops for the Catholic church, which is the dominant church in Peru, had banned all religious workers from going in the prison. The only people who were going in where our volunteers. I said, "Emmanuel, I know she was a nun. Please stop the car." He said, "Was she wearing a habit?" I said, "No."

Dr. Dobson: How'd you know, Chuck?

Chuck Colson: It was her face. Really, it was an extraordinary spiritual experience. I saw the face of Christ in the midst of those campesinas. So we drove up to the prison, which was surrounded by the army and difficult to get in. We were negotiating for about 10 minutes with these army troops to let us into the prison. And over the brow of the hill, up the road behind us came this woman running. Dusty feet, cloud of dust and she was yelling, "Chuck Colson, Chuck Colson, I'm sister, Anna." I looked over at Emmanuel and smiled and he looked absolutely stunned.

Chuck Colson: This nun came up, she was from Detroit, Michigan. She'd been 20 years living among the campesinas. Every day she'd gone into the prison. She heard I was coming, she was banned from the prison, but she heard I was coming and she asked if she could come down to the road, because maybe she could get back into the prison with me. This woman had an expression on her face that is difficult for me to describe. It was the radiance of Christ and it came from being 20 years living as Christ's person among the powerless and the helpless. And I saw it in her face, in the most remarkable way.

Chuck Colson: As we were sharing before, Jim, some verses of scripture that have had particular meaning to me where Jeremiah is called by God to go speak to the

kings. And Jeremiah says to the king, he pled the cause of the afflicted and needy. Then it was well. Is that not what it means to know me, declares the Lord. See, to know God, to plead the cause of the afflicted and the needy, to help the oppressed, to work among the suffering people.

Dr. Dobson: As compared with knowing about God.

Chuck Colson: Well, you see, the know there does not mean intellectually to know God. We can know God. The devil knows there's a God, people know that there is a God, but to know him in the intimate sense of a relationship. To know him in the sense of our fellowship with him. I think what Jeremiah is saying, I believe what God is saying through Jeremiah is if you want to know me, that is to fellowship the way you and I have had a rich time of fellowship together today, as two Christian brothers sitting with one another. To have that kind of fellowship with God, if you want that, you're not going to see his face, but you're going to have that fellowship with God when you plead the cause of the suffering and the hurting people for whom God has such compassion. That's the essence of justice in God's eyes.

Chuck Colson: If you want to be close to God, if you want that intimate fellowship, you can have it by pleading the cause of the afflicted and the needy and helping the suffering people for whom God has such compassion. I saw the visible manifestation of that passage of scripture in the face of that nun. And I saw it among the powerless. It was a very interesting experience walking through that prison. It was not an interesting experience, it was a chilling experience. I walked through the Lurigancho Prison and I was wearing leather soles, and no guards would walk through with us by the way, because they take hostages regularly. But that's my ministry and that's the place to go and I didn't give it a moment's thought.

Chuck Colson: We walked through but my shoes began to slide over the slime on the floor and I realized that it was the sewage overflowing into the center of the cell block. The stench was so bad that it was almost irresistible to put your hand up and hold your nose. But if I did it, I would have offended the inmates. I walked the corridors of that prison. I walked the cell blocks and there were some tough men and they were armed. It's a jungle inside.

Dr. Dobson: They were armed?

Chuck Colson: Oh, yes. A lot of them have knives and clubs and there's no guard walks in. The law of the jungle prevails inside that prison. But I would walk by these cells and the men would grab me, literally grab me by the arm and pull me into their cell and point proudly with a beaming smile on their face, to their Prison Fellowship, in prison discipleship seminar, graduation certificate. We put on a seminar in that prison in Lurigancho and the men went to it and they get a certificate signed by me. And in many cells that was the proudest possession of those men. They'd point to it, then they'd pointed themselves and they'd say, "See? Me, me, me," and they would be beaming.

Chuck Colson: We met with about 30 men in one cell block and one brought a guitar and we sang. I had just the most exciting time of Christian fellowship in that hellhole. As I was leaving, one old man grabbed me and he grabbed me by the hand. I'll never forget. He was clutching my hand and he said, "You great man, you great man, you come and you love us." He was an older man and you don't cry in prison, nobody cries in prison, but that fellow couldn't restrain himself. He started to sob and his shoulders were heaving and he was all sweaty and smelly and it didn't make any difference. I just took him in my arms and gave him a big embrace as he cried his eyes out on my shoulder.

Chuck Colson: The interesting thing is, I left that prison with that man having been in my arms and walked into the parliament and spoke to the president of the senate, to the commission on human rights, to the Supreme Court, all assembled. The powerful people of Peru came to hear me speak. And I still had the sweat of that old man on my shirt when I spoke to them.

Chuck Colson: But I preached in the prison in Costa Rica. Had a great meeting and an outdoor rally. And afterwards, some men came up to me and they asked me if I would baptize them. I said, "No, go see your priest or minister." I didn't want to be in the position of offending or proselytizing or anything else. They said, "We don't have a priest or minister. The only people here are Prison Fellowship volunteers. I said, "Well, some of them are ministers." And they said, "Well, won't you baptize me?" They were so insistent that I finally turned to my assistant. I said, "Well, get me some water." Then my assistant went over and got a bucket of water out of the horse trough and brought it back.

Chuck Colson: We had to leave the prison, having baptized several men and seen many come to the Lord. Had to leave that prison and go to the palace of the president who was receiving me that day. President Monge had me into his home. And I thought to myself, as I walked through the door into his office, it was basically the cabinet room, how many times I'd walked into the Oval Office in the White House. The ex-Marine Captain with my spit shined shoes. Today, I was walking in with mud on my feet. Mud from baptizing guys in a prison, to sit down with the president of that country and tell him about conditions in the prison. That doesn't make in sense in human terms and folks-

Dr. Dobson: Oh, it makes all the sense in the world.

Chuck Colson: But you see, secular folks who are listening to us are saying, "Oh, that's those Christians. They're so heavenly minded, they haven't got any earthly sense. The way to win the world is of course, take over the power structures." Power structures of the world have never led us into anything except catastrophe, calamity, war, defeat, disaster. The hope is that God, the ultimate judge of righteousness, the ultimate standard of truth and righteousness, proclaims his truth as he often does, to make folly of man's wisdom through the powerless. Because only when you're powerless, can you really see the strength of God. When I am weak, then am I strong. I'm convinced that the best things God does

are the things that grow out of our weakness and our desperation, never out of our strength.

Dr. Dobson: What do you say to those law abiding citizens in this country who feel totally powerless today?

Chuck Colson: Well, same thing I say to people in prison. And that is, you're never powerless because God has created you for a purpose. Your circumstances he knows. He is looking to the obedience of your heart and you can feel the power of a servant God in your life, by your relationship with him. I have a 94 year old woman in a nursing home. By the name of Merte Halloway. Her story is the concluding chapter of the book, Loving God. She wanted to die a few years ago and she really wanted to. She'd lost all of her family, she wasn't able to walk, she was in a nursing home, she was living on social security. She was ready to go home and she knew the Lord. She said as she knew she was dying, that she heard the words from Jesus, "Write to prisoners."

Chuck Colson: She thought, "Write to prisoners? I'm a country girl and we went through about the sixth grade at school. I don't know how to write." But she knew that was a command. When she got well from her illness, she wrote to the chaplain of the Atlanta jail and said, "I need to write the inmates. God's told me to." He put her in touch with us. Today, she writes to 40 inmates who call her grandma. She has led more people to Christ, she has the most fulfilling life. I visited her at her nursing home in Columbus, Georgia and it was an extraordinary experience. I went up to the ninth floor, here's this little bare walled room. She's got a 10 inch black and white television set. She's got a Bible with big print. She's got nothing else in this little room-

Dr. Dobson: Except she's got power.

Chuck Colson: A table and papers on it and she corresponds with inmates. I said, "Merte, God bless you. Thank you for what you're doing." She said, "Don't thank me, I thank you. These are the most fulfilling years of my life." See, she has found what God is saying. To care for the poor and the afflicted and the needy is to know God. She knows God, not just intellectually, but in an intimate sense and her life radiates it. So there isn't anybody listening to us who is powerless. If you're powerless, it's because you're taken in by the counterfeit values of this culture, which tell you that success and achievement and influence and prominence and celebrity is all that matters and that's false. What matters is your right relationship with the living God.

Dr. Dobson: And he has a special place in his heart for the powerless, doesn't he? Isn't that evident all through the scripture?

Chuck Colson: Oh, totally. Not only was the Bible written by powerless people, it's written with instructions to the powerful that they should care for the powerless. The Jews should care for the sojourner who happens into their midst. And remember, you

too were prisoners in Egypt and I brought you out of bondage. I mean, God is constantly talking about people who can't help themselves. And he's got a special place in His heart. I think people, when they come close to that relationship, come closer to the Lord. They come close to that intimate fellowship. People will always say to me, "How can I get close to the Lord? How can I get more spiritual? How can I grow?" Start talking about the scriptural basis for sharing in the suffering that Christ has for all of us, that's what draws you close.

Roger Marsh: You're listening to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. Today, we are sharing the final installment of a classic three-part conversation between Dr. Dobson and author, apologist, and Christian leader, Charles Colson. Even though this conversation was recorded in 1984, you'd be surprised at how relevant it still is to us even today. We hope you've been encouraged by what you've heard so far. And right now let's jump back into this conversation.

Dr. Dobson: Talk to the person at the other end of the spectrum. We've talked about the powerless. Now talk to the very powerful, talk to the corporation president who's got 500 employees under him. Talk to the person who inherited \$5 million dollars.

Chuck Colson: There's an anonymous saying, I don't know who said it, no one does apparently. But it goes something like this. It says, "The poor are better off than the rich, because the poor still think that money will buy them happiness, while the rich know better." If you really are honest with yourself, you realize that the power you have is going to go sometime. People in public office, they hate to retire because they can't give up that power. And it's a delusion, it's a snare, it's a trap. What you have in power and money and wealth and fame isn't really going to amount to much.

Chuck Colson: What's going to matter is what's going on in your heart, your relationship with God. When you walk into your office and you look at that very impressive place, and you look out over that sea of people you're commanding their lives, that should humble you. That's a trust that God has given you. That's a little bit of stewardship. And if you let it go to your head, you're going to destroy yourself. And if you let-

Dr. Dobson: And a lot of other people.

Chuck Colson: And a lot of other people in the process. I think you just have to daily give it up and say, "God, this is yours. Let me be a servant today. Let me be a servant. Let me serve. Find me a way I can serve."

Dr. Dobson: I got to ask you a question. I have been invited to the White House a few times, and there is a sense of awe at being there. The history of it, just knowing who's been there and what conversations have taken place in the cabinet room and

the Oval Office. But I'll bet, with you having been on the other side of those invitations, people come in there with their knees absolutely quaking don't they? They come in there and just are bowled over by-

Chuck Colson: Yes. Of course, when I was the president's assistant, one of my jobs was to maintain liaison with all of the various special interest groups in the country, including religious groups. I would bring in business leaders and labor leaders and farmers and educational leaders and religious leaders. I found that often the most naive were the religious leaders. I think because they had come from a church background, they come from a more humble attitude about life and they've been less involved in the power structures. And what they would come in, they're going to pound on the president's desk about this outrageous thing or that outrageous thing.

Chuck Colson: And the lions of the waiting room became the lambs of the Oval Office. They would walk in and they would look around and they would see the flags and the Great Seal of the United States woven into the rug and it would be almost a blinding light coming from behind the president's desk, as he would get up and shake hands and give them little trinkets and you'd see them just melt.

Chuck Colson: The thing I worry about a little bit today, Jim, and it's a very pertinent subject, is that we Christians who have a mandate to be involved in every aspect of life. At least my theological perspective is that Christians belong in the media and they belong in business and they belong in law. Ministry is not just people who are full-time paid professionals. Ministry is every Christian's duty to make an impact for Christ in every area of life. We belong in politics. Christians belong in government, Christians belong working for justice and righteousness in society, which means that we are concerned about the laws and the fabric of society as it is established by the political leaders, because that restrains sin and that promotes righteousness.

Dr. Dobson: Yeah, there's another half to that equation. You got it coming.

Chuck Colson: But you got to be very, very careful. Nietzsche put it, "When you fight a dragon, be careful you don't become a dragon." When you began to get into that political aura and that political battleground, where we belong, we got to be voting, got to be instruments of righteousness. Be careful that we don't get taken in and used by the political apparatus. See, I remember when I was in the White House, I looked over all the special interest structures and I looked over the religious leadership and I saw all the evangelical leaders and I got their names and invited them in for briefings and took them in. And the president would give them a little pat on the head in the Oval Office and they all marched out of there just allies. We made them friends and you've got to be careful.

Chuck Colson: I don't think it's wrong for politicians to try to use religious people. It's understandable. They're going to use anybody they can do to further their interest in power. What I say to the religious brother and to the Christian brother in particular, is don't allow yourself to be trapped. Don't get so

impressed that we now have so-called power and political muscle in society that we sell ourselves out to any political movement. Or that we make the gospel of Jesus Christ hostage to the political agenda or fortunes of any man or party. [crosstalk 00:18:00] Ours is a kingdom which is transcendent of the kingdoms of this world. And the kingdoms of this world will one day be the kingdoms of our Lord.

Chuck Colson: It's awful easy when you begin to get invited into the White House and you begin to feel all that power and access or invited into the Congress, or romanced by local politicians, to suddenly believe that you've acquired political power. Then you're afraid to take a stand for Christ that might upset that, or you're afraid to assert your independence if you have to. And you gradually get taken into where you're the handmaiden of the politician. He'll do that to you, he's in business to do it, he makes no bones about it. I was on the other side of events doing it. It was my assigned job and it's not wrong because it's part of the political process. But it's wrong if we're naive enough not to see they want to use us.

Dr. Dobson: Now, historically the Christian message has been, it's so evil and it's so dirty. And that danger you talked about is so real, that Christians have been told to stay out of it. You're not saying that.

Chuck Colson: No, and that's why I said from my theological perspective, which is more a formed view, which is that Christians belong in every aspect of life. I'm not a separatist. I don't say stay out or keep your hands clean or I'm not an Anabaptist who turns my back on the political process. I believe we belong involved and being instruments of justice. But I think we have to be careful that we don't get co-opted by the system. Power itself is not evil. Power is inherently corrupting. God exercises power, sovereign power over the universe, God creating the universe exercises power. There has to be power or the vacuum or absence of power leads to the worst kind of tyranny of all, which is anarchy. Which is simply people in their sinful nature destroying one another. I mean, God exercised power over man when he put the first cop on the beat, which was the angel in the garden of Eden with a flaming sword.

Chuck Colson: That's the first evidence we have of government. That's restraining man from his sinful state. That's absolutely essential. It's a question of how it is used. It is a question of whether it is as it is ordained of God or selfishly used by man. But in the process, we have to understand that whenever we have power, it becomes inherently corrupting to us because of our sinful nature. And the only antidote to that is to serve and to give it away and to return it to God and to seek the authority of God. There needs to be an authority structure in the family, needs to be an authority structure in prisons, in every human relationship there needs to be an authority structure. But it should be as God is ordaining it, rather than man in his sinful nature is seeking it to impose his will upon others. And that's a very fine distinction.



Dr. Dobson: Power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely. But authority does not corrupt.

Chuck Colson: And it is essential.

Dr. Dobson: It is essential.

Chuck Colson: Man, without it, is left to total anarchy. Paul, when he completed his first missionary journey, he went back and appointed elders to have authority over the church.

Dr. Dobson: Well, Chuck, this has been such a fascinating discussion of power. It is, as you said, a very complex topic because it involves the heart and soul of what it means to be human. This is built into our nature. Maybe this is part of the sinful nature of mankind with Eve saying, "I know what God said, but I want the fruit in the center of the garden and I will do what I want to do." And Adam saying, "Well, I think you're right. I'll go along with you." So that very first encounter with God that we know about was one involving power and how we control it and how it controls us.

Chuck Colson: That's exactly right.

Dr. Dobson: This has been very enlightening to me and I'll probably write my next book on it. Thanks for giving me your good ideas.

Chuck Colson: Well, it's been a great discussion and I think it's one that hits right at the heartbeat of where so many millions of people are in our society. Many who feel powerless and feel alienated because of the technology of our age and they sit back feeling helpless and therefore their powerlessness on one sense is a cause of great frustration. On the other hand, people are struggling with power and how they exercise it in their families and their workplace. It's a very sensitive and difficult subject and I hope we've made people at least, I don't know if we gave them so many answers, is we've made people at least think of the problems. And maybe help them prayerfully deal with them in their own lives.

Dr. Dobson: Let me just ask you one last question. You and I are moving through the midlife years and old age is coming. I hate to think about that, but it's down there someplace. And with it comes the powerlessness that we've talked about. How do you see that prospect for your future? Having had ultimate power and now having another kind of power through a ministry, how will you deal with powerlessness?

Chuck Colson: Well, I think this has to be a peace that comes from the sovereignty of God. How does a person who is a paraplegic, for example, deal with the awful feeling that their brain wants them to do something, but the body won't respond. That's the ultimate sense of powerlessness, I think.

Dr. Dobson: Can you handle it?

Chuck Colson: I don't know until I get there, but I'm going to do my best, trusting that God will give me that certainty of being in his will that will enable me. Without God, no, I could not. I couldn't have gone through prison. A man who was always in control of my own affairs, suddenly to be thrust into a prison and absolutely helpless and powerless and strapped in, but I knew that God had not taken his hand off me. I knew there had to be some purpose and I knew that God would see me through. I think he will never tempt you beyond that which you can bear. And I think he will never put you in a situation that he will leave you where you can't handle it.

Dr. Dobson: And just over that great river is ultimate power.

Chuck Colson: Ultimate power. Ultimate paradise and peace.

Dr. Dobson: For eternity.

Chuck Colson: Amen.

Roger Marsh: Well, what an incredibly poignant way to end this third and final installment of Dr. Dobson's classic conversation with Chuck Colson titled, The Use and Abuse of Power. I'm Roger Marsh, and you are listening to Family Talk. Now, perhaps you might consider becoming part of the Prison Fellowship outreach in your area. As Jesus said, in Matthew 26, verse 40, "Whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

Roger Marsh: Now to learn more about the late Chuck Colson and the ministry of Prison Fellowship, visit our broadcast page at [drjamesdobson.org/broadcast](http://drjamesdobson.org/broadcast). Also, if you missed any of the broadcast over the past three days, featuring the entire conversation between Dr. Dobson and Chuck Colson, you can hear them in their entirety at [drjamesdobson.org/broadcast](http://drjamesdobson.org/broadcast).

Roger Marsh: Remember, you can also reach us by phone. We'd love to pray with you. Maybe we can suggest a resource for you or answer any questions you might have about the ministry of Family Talk and the James Dobson Family Institute. Our number to call is (877) 732-6825, that's (877) 732-6825. Anytime day or night, we are here for you.

Roger Marsh: And one final note, you can always drop us a line. We would love to hear from you through the mail. Write to us at our ministry mailing address. The Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, PO Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado. The zip code 80949. Once again, our ministry mailing address is The Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, PO Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80949.

Roger Marsh: For everyone here at Family Talk, I'm Roger Marsh. Hope you have a great weekend and be sure to join us again on Monday for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

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