



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: The Use and Abuse of Power - Part 2

Guest(s): Chuck Colson

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Dr. Dobson: Hello, everyone. You're listening to Family Talk, a radio broadcasting ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. James Dobson and thank you for joining us for this program.

Roger Marsh: Welcome to Family Talk, the listener supported broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh, and today we are featuring part two of an enlightening three-part conversation with the late apologist and author Chuck Colson on the topic of the use and abuse of power. Before serving as a senior aide to president Richard Nixon, Chuck Colson graduated from Brown University and earned a law degree from George Washington University, then started a successful law practice. While awaiting trial in the Watergate scandal, he met an old friend, Tom Phillips of the Raytheon Corporation who shared his Christian testimony with Chuck.

Roger Marsh: Colson, whose life had been totally turned upside down by his own abuse of power, devoured C. S. Lewis's book, Mere Christianity. God truly used the words of C. S. Lewis to convict Chuck Colson, and the White House hatchet man, as he was known, professed faith in Christ on the 12th of August, 1973. Chuck's conversion prompted him to plead guilty to a charge of obstruction of justice, rather than waiting for court proceedings with further legal maneuvers.

Roger Marsh: After serving seven months in prison, Chuck wrote the best-selling autobiographical book called Born Again. With the proceeds from the book sales, he started Prison Fellowship ministries. He felt that God had called him to provide spiritual and emotional support to prisoners all across America. While Chuck Colson went to heaven on the 21st of April 2012, his legacy lives on in the changed lives of those in prison and those in the pew alike. He is survived by his wife of 48 years, Patty, he has three grown children and five grandchildren. His legacy also lives on through the Colson Center for Christian Worldview. You can learn more about that at drjamesdobson.org. Let's listen now to part two of Dr. Dobson's 1984 conversation with Chuck Colson, entitled, The Use and Abuse of Power, here on Family Talk.

Dr. Dobson: I want to continue our conversation today, which we began last time about power in its various context, how there's a lust and a thirst for power in the

human spirit. Now, we were talking about that in the political sense, referring to your years in the White House, and even in the sense of what you and I are experiencing now, as leaders of Christian organizations. There's a lust for power in that context too and everyone who's in a position of leadership has to deal with that.

Dr. Dobson: But what I'd like to do now is to apply that a little more specifically to where the listener is. Let's talk about the lust for power for a businessman or a businesswoman, that person who's facing stiff competition. And there's this intense desire to move those people around that would compete with you and take business away from you, and to manipulate them at your will. Or even talk about power from the perspective of the wife and mother. What are the dangers there? Is it the same story?

Chuck Colson: It's exactly the same story and it's very, very insidious. It's the power of delusion. It's the idea that we can impose our will upon another, which by the way, is gratifying to the individual. This is what Nietzsche wrote about, that we impose our will upon others and that is gratifying to us. Much of the sexual lust comes from that basic root in my opinion. I deal with this, of course, in the prisons where I minister because the power structure is so intense among the convicts. I think the worst part about it is that we don't see it in ourselves. It's almost impossible to see in ourselves, so we really have to rely upon the intimate relationship with loved ones, and we have to be obedient to Christ.

Chuck Colson: See, Jesus gives us the answer. When he was tempted by the devil, there were three temptations in Luke 4. He was tempted first by possessions. The devil said, "Turn this stone into bread," and he was hungry. And then he was tempted by the power of the world, the dominion over the world, which the devil offered him. And how tempting that must've been to Jesus to avoid the crucifixion, to avoid going through whatever he had to go through. So the second was the temptation of power. The third was the temptation of pride, because the devil said to him, "If you are the son of God, ha!" And you see all the temptations we'll ever be faced with Jesus experienced. And as you pointed out so well last night, it was in his humanity he had to really have been tempted. He had to have wanted those things, which of course he would.

Dr. Dobson: If he didn't want them, then he wasn't tempted.

Chuck Colson: In his humanity. They weren't temptations. But he resisted each one and interestingly enough he resisted them by saying, "It is written. It is written. It is said." That is, he referred back to the word of God, and I think the word of God is our only defense. I think, as we soak it in, as we read it, as we absorb it, as it begins to have meaning to us, we then are protected to some degree against the temptations of power. And I don't know any other way out.

Chuck Colson: I mean, Jesus said, "He would lead. Let him serve." Now, the businessman is trying to get authority. He can order his people around. He can scream and shout at him. But remember that one day he may be out of that job and he

hasn't earned their respect, but the businessman walks in, in the morning and has got a subordinate who isn't quite making it. And he walks in and says, "Jim, can I help you? Is this something that I can do today to help you?" Wow. I mean, that's what Jesus teaches. And he is then earned that man's respect.

Chuck Colson: I've often found that the best way to lead is by example. I learned that in the Marine Corps. In the Marine Corps, you were told, you never went into the mess line to get your food, I was an officer, until all the enlisted men at eaten. And if somebody was down, you showed them how to do it. You led them. And the great command of a Marine officer was, "Follow me." It was never, "You go do this." It was, "Come after me. I'll go first." It's exactly the words Jesus uses to his disciples, "Follow me."

Dr. Dobson: "Follow me."

Chuck Colson: He set the example, so that a leader is sets the example by being willing to do anything he asks his people to do.

Chuck Colson: And there's not only is there spiritual truth in what Jesus says about, "He who would lead, let him serve." But there is great wisdom in that because you earn the respect of the people around you, and you can in human relations. You can force people to do things. If somebody is coming to fix your refrigerator, you can force them to do certain things, or you can make them feel that you really appreciate it and you really are interested in them as human beings. And I think what you begin to discover is that you can gain people's respect and you will then have authority, moral authority. And that's exactly what Jesus of course is teaching.

Dr. Dobson: Let me ask you the best question of all. This is fantastic. Apply all of this now to husband and wife relationships, because I see most marital struggles right at this point.

Chuck Colson: Well, now this would be like my asking you, Jim, to figure out how to evangelize in a prison. I'm sitting here with a one man in America who knows more about marital relationships than anybody else, and you're asking me to sum it up?

Dr. Dobson: I have an idea you can handle a question.

Chuck Colson: As a rank amateur, and as one who has to struggle to do this in my own life, I feel that if you are always looking out for the interest of your mate ahead of yourself, which is really one definition of love, to will the best for somebody else even at your own expense, if you've got open communication. And if you are looking at your relationship with your partner as one of serving their needs, that you will have a magnificent relationship, it is when you are trying to get the other person to constantly fill your need rather than your being interested in filling their need, that the relationship begins to break down. Not just husband and wife, it's true with your kids.

Chuck Colson: I mean, I've seen parents who want to sit and lecture their kids. A lot better if you ask them things and sort of draw them out and you're really interested in their welfare, and then suddenly they realize you care. And I find this with prisoners. I find it in all human relationships. I can do an awful lot more listening and I can do an awful lot more saying, "Tell me about what I can do to help you." And suddenly you discover that you're then able to influence that person in a way that you couldn't if you'd walked in and said, "Let me tell you what the answer is." And I think most husbands and wives try to manipulate each other by getting them to do the things for them, rather than trying to do something for them.

Dr. Dobson: The great struggle of the first two years of marriage and especially the first year is determining the power structure, is deciding who controls, who leads. And in many cases, the woman will say, "I don't want to control this family. I yield to the leadership of my husband," and yet she has all of the reigns of authority in her hands, and she undermines him every time he attempts to make a decision.

Dr. Dobson: And the real key to who's in charge is what happens when they disagree. As long as they are in harmony with one another, they both want to live here and they both want to work there, and they both want to have this number of children at this time, and they both want to get up at this time and know who's going to make the coffee. As long as all those issues are resolved, there is no power struggle, but it's when they come nose to nose in confrontation and one cannot compromise because he sees it so strongly. And she can't compromise because this is not something that she's prepared to yield on. What happens in those moments?

Dr. Dobson: The power struggle involves who predominates. And that whole first year is a settling in of power. And if it's not handled properly, if one has all the power and the other one has none, then the relationship may survive, but it will be a damaged relationship. And I wish that I had an opportunity to talk to every newlywed couple just about this subject, because it can either make or break a marriage. And often they get off on the wrong foot right here on how they use power, and it results in a divorce 25 years later.

Chuck Colson: That's fascinating. The only thing I can say, Jim, is that I hope my wife is not listening to this broadcast. Having just said that it is wanting to serve the other person and having a wife who supports me so much in the ministry. She's going to tell me I don't practice at home what I'm preaching over the air, and I probably don't.

Dr. Dobson: My views on this subject are a little bit unconventional in Christian circles because the characteristic message that is given in conservative Christian circles, I disagree with, which is one of total powerlessness in relationship. And when you have that, you have the same thing you saw in international relationships where one imperfect country led by sinful imperfect people will dominate another one if that opportunity is available.

Dr. Dobson: And what makes for the healthiest international relationships is a balance of power in a context of love. And what makes for the best marriage is a balance of power where both sides respect the other one. And not that there is not masculine leadership, I believe in that, but that there is a mutual respect that results in a balance in the decision-making process and input from both sides. It'd take me another 30 minutes to explain what I'm trying to say, but love must be tough is really an expression of what happens when one side has all the power.

Chuck Colson: That's right. Well, there's no worse tyranny than anarchy. It's the vacuum of power that will create the greatest tyranny.

Dr. Dobson: Even in a Christian home.

Chuck Colson: Yes.

Dr. Dobson: Chuck, let's turn a corner and apply all this to the Prison Fellowship Ministries that you're working in and those who are perhaps possessing the least power in our culture. I know you just came back from Latin America and you visited some of the prisons down there. Talk for a minute about those who are completely devoid of power.

Chuck Colson: Well, I had some very sobering lessons in my recent trip to Colombia, Costa Rica and Peru. In Colombia I had a meeting with the Minister of Justice. It was a courtesy call that was simply going into thank the Minister for his cooperation with our ministry. And I walked in his office and I was immediately struck by him. He's a very powerful man with a great presence about them, young man, less than 40. And we sat down and then I had all of the prison fellowship trustees with me, and he had many of his aides with him. And I told him what prison fellowship was doing and the prisons. And I told him, I'd just come from his central prison, and the moment I did his eyes flashed, and he leaned forward in his chair and he said, "Tell me about the conditions in the prison." And so we started talking about the prison, and he called in a two of his subordinates and he said, "I want this stopped. I want that changed. This man is absolutely right. There's corruption in that prison. We've got to do something about it.

Dr. Dobson: I'm sure he knew that, Chuck, he didn't need an American to tell him that.

Chuck Colson: No, he didn't accept. I think some of the things I said really triggered a reaction on his part. It was very spontaneous. This was a very courageous man, Minister Lara Bonilla, and he was cracking down on the mafia at the time, a much heralded campaign against drug traffic out of Colombia, one of the first Colombian political officials to do that. And I did tell him some things I'd seen in the prison that I'm not sure he realized.

Chuck Colson: And I could, I knew it just from my perspective as a prisoner. In any event, within minutes, the idea of a courtesy meeting dissolved and the most animated

conversation. I've met with many of the world's leaders, I've known them personally, and I've sat across the table from many of them. This was one of the most impressive men I've met in government. He was keen and sharp and honest, full of enthusiasm and integrity and a real desire to do the right thing and bright and quick. And we had a marvelous, just a friendship that developed spontaneously.

Dr. Dobson: How long were you in there?

Chuck Colson: Almost an hour. He called in his a photographer and we took some pictures. And as I was going out, he had a huge crucifix on the wall and I just sensed he was a believer and I turned to him. I said, "I'd like you to take a copy of my recent book." Second book, Life Sentence, translated in Spanish. And then he embraced me and he said, "Please come back and send a man back. We want you to work with us in the prisons."

Chuck Colson: Well, we walked out of his office. To make a long story short, the trustees or prison fellowship, their feet weren't hitting the ground because here in all of a couple of years, several years we've been working in Colombia we'd never had the access to the most powerful man effecting the prisons in the criminal justice system.

Chuck Colson: He was endorsing what we were saying. He wanted to end corruption. I went back to the hotel, changed clothes because I was speaking at a dinner that night and two hours when I arrived at the dinner everyone was huddled around television sets and radios, listening to the reports. And someone turned to me, ashen faced and said, "Minister Lara Bonilla has been assassinated on the way home in the car. I was the last person to see them alive. As a matter of fact, the extraordinary thing was the next morning, the newspaper or the radio that night said he was reading a book, Life Sentence, when he was shot murdered by two mafia gunman who came up on either side of the car and machine gunned him to death.

Chuck Colson: There was a picture in the newspaper the next day in Colombia that was absolutely striking. It was the backseat of the all covered with blood and glass splatted about, and there was my book opened and sitting on the back seat covered in blood. He was reading Life Sentence when he died.

Chuck Colson: There were some lessons in this as you can well imagine. First of all, our mortality. I preached that night to a group of non-believing people on peace with God, and after the assassination of the Minister, and there were a lot of government officials at the dinner that I was speaking at, I tell you, I had their attention. They were interested in what it meant to have peace with God and to know Jesus Christ and to be assured of eternal life because they realized how life can be snuffed out on the second. And the second thing that really struck me, however, was for the two hours that the trustees of prison fellowship at Colombia were floating on air because they had access to the place of power.

Chuck Colson: And we've been working in the prisons there for a long time, and suddenly the Minister of Justice was on our side. And justice suddenly-

Dr. Dobson: Was snuffed out.

Chuck Colson: ...snuffed out. And you look all over Latin American, you see the same thing. You see progressive leaders come in and take over a country and they're killed or they're deposed of the army takes over this revolution. And I saw in Central America, just a microcosm of what is to me an epidemic problem worldwide. There is no political solution in Latin America.

Dr. Dobson: Or anywhere else.

Chuck Colson: Or anywhere else. And if you look at the times in which we live, the great paradox of these times is that so great is the power that we're basically powerless. We have a paralysis of power. We have so much power we're paralyzed. And I think when people look back upon this era of the latter part of the 20th century, they will say it was marked by this extraordinary contrast, this remarkable paradox, all the power in the world, and we can't solve our problems and we're paralyzed by it.

Chuck Colson: The world is actually paralyzed at a time when there's so much power. That's one of the things I saw, and that's why the power delusion is such a dangerous thing. We think there's all this power in the world. We can't cope with the human problems that are erupting in violence and tragedy in every corner of the globe. They're fundamentally spiritual problems.

Dr. Dobson: Be solved in a spiritual way.

Chuck Colson: Through the gospel. And that's why Rios Montt the former President of Guatemala said he's not going to run for office again because he can't do any good as the president of Guatemala. What he's going to do is go preach the gospel through Central America. He said, "There's no hope in Central America."

Chuck Colson: Now you see at the same time that I saw this paradox in Central America, I saw the answer. Costa Rica, in the prison in Costa Rica. The men were languishing with nothing to do and the prison fellowship volunteer started at the prison, and they saw that there was all this land around the prison. And so they started a prison farm and got some money from World Vision and got some seed and planted sugar cane. Now, most of the inmates in that prison work in their own cooperative prison farm started by the ministry and managed by volunteers and Bible studies going on in the farm camps, and a great spiritual movement in that prison. And in the place of powerlessness, I saw a vision of the invisible kingdom being made visible at a time when all the governments with all of their power are powerless.

Chuck Colson: It's part of the same historical pattern we see all through the Bible, God dealing with the power structures through the powerless, sending a powerless peasant to speak to the powerful Kings Amos, Hosea. Oh, but look at the Bible. The Bible is basically written by powerless people. After David and Solomon, the authors of the Bible are all powerless. They're all a bunch of scruffy peasants. They're all the kind of people we'd turn our back on if they walked into church today. If Hosea walked in, everybody started mumbling to one another. His wife is running around with someone. Can you imagine we're going to let him in our church?

Dr. Dobson: The man smells bad.

Chuck Colson: And the man smells bad. Sure. Or the original disciples, the 12 who followed Jesus-

Dr. Dobson: The fishermen. Yeah.

Chuck Colson: I call them the dirty dozen, the fishermen. They had no power, influence, money. They were nothing. And yet they wrote the Bible. Much of what we read today of the word of God is revealed to us through the eyes of the powerless. See, and I saw in Central American and South America, the work of the powerless in the prisons as a glorious testimony to the invisible kingdom at a time when the visible kingdoms are paralyzed. And that's the paradox of these times.

Dr. Dobson: Chuck, what does it do to you personally to look into the face of one of these absolutely powerless people in Latin America and to look into his eyes and tell him that he's worth more than the possessions of the entire world and that Jesus Christ died for him, and to have him respond emotionally in that way? Does that give you a greater kick than sitting in the oval office and making decisions that'll be in headlines the next day? Honestly now?

Chuck Colson: Oh my, I look back on those days. Honestly, in the depths of my heart, I can tell you people often say to me, "Well, you're just posturing to go back into the politics." I couldn't go back into politics. I'd find it dull and uninteresting and unfulfilling and unrewarding. There's nothing I ever do to, I mean, you could play Hail to the Chief on the Marine Corps band and come off of Air Force One with the crowd cheering. And it meant nothing compared to seeing the transforming power of Christ, the reality of Christ in the faces of those people.

Dr. Dobson: Yeah. A lot of Americans view inmates as the ones responsible for the fear that keeps them locked behind their doors. And there's a great deal of anger, I think expressed those in prison. Maybe for good reason.

Chuck Colson: Sure. Well, to some extent there is good reason, but the fear is based upon crime. And what you need to remember is that the inmates in prison have committed 2% of the crimes committed in the United States, 98%-

Dr. Dobson: Go unpunished.

Chuck Colson: Go unpunished. And so you may have somebody on your block you got more reason to be angry at than the guy in the prison, plus the guy in prison, if we believe in our system is taking his punishment and being punished. And I believe in punishment, I believe in accountability for our own sins. I believe that we need to be held to account, but at the same time, we should be compassionate and be looking for ways to rehabilitate those people and bring them back into society in a meaningful way, which is what the gospel does. So I get the joy and the fulfillment of seeing their dignity and their personhood and their respect given back to them by the gospel. That's what it does. At the same time, I feel a renewed determination to do something about the conditions which many of those people live in.

Dr. Dobson: Chuck, you and I spent three hours in my office, and the conversation never lagged. And we have now gone through two programs here talking about power. And I feel like we could talk forever. Would you let us continue one more day?

Chuck Colson: Oh, I'd be honored. I'd love it. I will take any time of fellowship I can have with you, Jim.

Roger Marsh: You've been listening to Chuck Colson, former senior aide to President Richard Nixon and the founder of Prison Fellowship here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, and I was really intrigued by Chuck's summary of the three temptations that Jesus faced in the desert by the devil, the temptation of possessions, the temptation of power and the temptation of pride. Those are three temptations that all of us face as well. Chuck rightly declared that the word of God is our only defense against the temptations of the enemy. That is why we need to read the Bible, to memorize it and meditate upon it each and every day.

Roger Marsh: Now Chuck Colson also suggested there is no better antidote for our innate lust for power than to serve others. Whenever we serve our spouse or our children, people in our workplace, or even our friends at church, our service will communicate the love of Christ.

Roger Marsh: In Matthew chapter 18 when Christ disciples asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, our savior called a child, put him in the midst of them and said, 'Truly, I say to you, unless you become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.'" It's no wonder Chuck Colson spent so much of his time speaking to the most powerless people on earth, the prisoners, about this transforming power of Christ.

Roger Marsh: Now to learn more about the Late Chuck Colson and the Ministry of Prison Fellowship and the Chuck Colson Center for Christian Worldview visit our

broadcast page at DrJamesdobson.org. And if you want to hear any portion of the broadcast you might've missed go to DrJamesdobson.org/broadcast.

Roger Marsh: By the way, if you have a question about Family Talk, or if you're looking for a suggested resource, we'll be happy to make those recommendations for you when you call us at (877) 732-6825. That's (877) 732-6825. Be sure to join us again tomorrow to hear the conclusion, the third and final part of Chuck Colson's conversation with Dr. Dobson entitled The Use and Abuse of Power. I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for listening today.

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

Dr. Dobson: How important is a father's role in the overall health and wellbeing of a son or daughter? Some years ago, a greeting card company decided to do something special for Mother's Day. They set up a table in a federal prison inviting any inmate who so desired to send a free card to his mom. The lines were so long they had to make another trip to the factory to get more cards. Due to the success of the event, they decided to do the same thing on Father's Day. Only this time, no one came, not one prisoner felt the need to send a card to dad. And many had no idea who their fathers even were. What a sobering illustration about the importance of a father's relationship with his children.

Dr. Dobson: Contrast that story with a conversation I once had with a man named Bill Holden, who was president of a large construction firm. Through the years, he had hired and managed thousands of employees. I asked him when you're thinking of hiring an employee, especially a man, what do you look for? His answer surprised me. He said, I look primarily at the relationship between the man and his father. If he felt loved by his dad and respected his authority, he's likely to be a good employee. Then he added, I won't hire a young man who has been in rebellion against his dad. He'll have difficulty with me too. Fathers, never underestimate the incredible influence you have on your children, both your sons and your daughters.

Roger Marsh: To find out how you can partner with Family Talk, go to DrJamesDobson.org.