



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: An Immigrant's Journey of Faith and Freedom to America – Part 2

Guest(s): Cornel Potra

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Dr. James Dobson: You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I am that James Dobson, and I'm so pleased that you've joined us today.

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome back to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. If you're concerned about how our government may erode away our personal God-given rights and freedoms, well, you'll want to turn up the volume for today's broadcast. During the next half hour, our Gary Bauer will continue his discussion with his guest, attorney and Pastor Cornel Potra, who immigrated from Romania and became a legal citizen of the United States.

He then established a church, and then went to law school and is now the founder of the Potra Law Firm where he currently practices immigration law. There is so much to get to in today's broadcast, so let's join Gary Bauer and Cornel Potra right now on Family Talk.

Gary Bauer: Welcome back with us. We have Cornel Potra, and it's great to be able to continue our conversation. Cornel, I'm sure you remember that during all of that, and it seems like an incredible nightmare even thinking back on it, but many governors decided that they would close everything in order to stop the spread, as we were told. But they also said, "Look, we'll leave some things open that are essential, absolutely essential, but we'll close other things," which was the great majority of institutions and many of these...

Cornel Potra: Including the churches.

Gary Bauer: Yes, many of these governors said abortion clinics were essential or marijuana stores where you could buy your marijuana, they were essential, but churches were not essential and many of these governors ordered the churches to close. Well, it's the exact opposite.

I mean, that is the time that a nation needs to provide a way for people to get spiritual support and sustenance. But it was to me a very telling time of what we're facing in America that some politicians seem so eager to close the churches down in the name of fighting COVID.

Cornel Potra: That is so true, Gary, and I would like to make a parallel between how the government managed to shut down the churches in the United States and control the people and the communists, how they shut down the churches in Romania during communism. Only authorized churches were allowed to function and had the freedom to assemble, and those churches were controlled by the government. The pastors were controlled by the government.

I see a similarity between what happened during COVID and the control the government. Gary, this nation will have to decide what kind of government do we want in the future in this country. A government that thinks they know better than us? A government that controls us, that shuts us down, shuts our voices down, shuts down our freedom of assembly, of speech, of exercising our faith in God?

This is a decision that will be made, I believe, during this next election, November 5th. And this is a call to all those people who love freedoms to rise up and go to the voting booth and vote the right way. Because we know if we allow another election to pass by us without sanctioning the people who are in charge of our freedoms in the future, we will see disaster coming upon this land.

Gary Bauer: When we were talking a little earlier and you were referring to growing up in Romania and I believe you said that you were in a Christian family, how did you first come to Christ living under communism and you became a pastor before you became a lawyer? How did that calling to become a pastor, how did God put that on your heart?

Cornel Potra: I was born in a large family and my parents were Christian. I can't remember doing anything else but going to church on Sunday morning and Sunday afternoon. And sometimes our Sunday services lasted from early morning until late evening. The whole day we would sit in church and listen to the word of God and sing and praise the Lord. At the age of 14, I gave my life to the Lord.

I was in a church in my hometown of Oradea and the sermon was directly for my heart. And I received Christ as my personal savior. And as a result of that, I was persecuted in school and I was subject to so many restrictions by my teachers, my educators, and by the system itself. But after I gave my life to the Lord, the Lord planted a seed in my heart to learn the English language.

Someone in my church who came secretly to visit our church gave me a New Testament, a Gideons New Testament in English, and I started to learn the English language out of that KJV New Testament. It was my best gift that I received in Romania, a Bible, a New Testament in English. And as I was able to learn the English language from that little booklet, I was able to translate for the missionaries who came to Romania, brought Bibles across the border.

We would distribute them throughout the country. And because of that, my family and myself, we were put on the blacklist of Christians in Romania who did not accept the communist rules and the communist limitations put on the

people of the country. Actually during that time was illegal to even speak with a person from the United States or from another country.

And if you did, you were supposed to report the content of that conversation with the secret police forces of the government. And as I refused to do that, obviously I was marked as an instigator. I was marked as a person that did not obey the rules of communism. So I tried to escape multiple times. They caught me, they put me in jail, was sentenced one time as a result of not being able to cross the border, I was sentenced to one year of forced labor.

Another time I was sentenced to a few weeks of jail time, probation time. And finally, when my life was in danger, the Lord opened up the border for me and an opportunity to escape, although it was very, very risky. Many people lost their lives trying to escape Romania. Many people think, "Oh, it was an adventure." It was an adventure with God, but it was a life risk that I took upon myself.

Many people lost their lives trying to cross the border. Romania was similar to how North Korea is today. During my last days in Romania, it was a very tough country to escape from, but the Lord brought me here. The Lord opened up the door, and here I am with my family and I am so grateful for the freedoms that we're still enjoying in this country.

Gary Bauer:

I had the blessing of being able to work for Ronald Reagan for all eight years of his presidency, and of course, one of his main goals, and he really felt after the assassination attempt on his life that failed, although he was grievously wounded, he believed that God had protected him from death for a reason.

And he decided that that reason was that as president, he should do everything he could to bring down communism in the Soviet Union. And so much of his presidency was devoted to not only trying to do that, but to also doing things that would encourage the captive nations behind the Iron Curtain, nations like Poland and Czechoslovakia and Hungary and Romania.

Often people told me that hearing things that Reagan would say in his speeches about how every man deserved liberty and that no government should be able to tell a man how to worship and so forth, that that got through the censorship and to people living under communism, and it was an inspiration to those struggling people.

Do you recall any time during those years growing up when you were inspired or encouraged by what political leaders like Reagan were saying here in the US?

Cornel Potra:

That's a very good question, Gary. Unfortunately, in Romania, the news were censored, so much so that we only had two hours of speeches by the dictator. We were limited to how much TV we could watch every day. And all that we

received on the national TV station was speeches from the dictator and propaganda put out by the communists. All the news coming from outside Romania, not many people were able to listen.

There was a radio station that we could tune into was Free Europe. And often we would tune in to just listen to a sermon preached by a pastor from the United States in the Romanian language. But unfortunately, I was not able to participate in the news from the United States and receive news from the United States.

But later on, after I came to the United States, I was able to learn more about President Reagan and fall in love with his policies and the legacy that he left behind. Incredible. And then the speech that he gave in Europe to Gorbachev, "Tear this wall down." Incredible the influence, the impact of a man who survived an attack and the impact that he had on millions and millions of people on this entire world and how the Iron Curtain fell.

Incredible impact. And I just pray to God that God will raise again such people as President Reagan. And we have seen how similar attempts today in our days happen under our own eyes. And we pray that God will protect those people who are standing up for our freedoms. And again, I'm coming back to the elections of November 5th. I pray that America will wake up and that we will vote the right way this time around.

Gary Bauer: Cornel, I will not in any way interrupt you from continuing to urge our listening audience to be good Christian citizens. If everybody that was in church on Sunday and at work on Monday was in the voting booth on Tuesday, America would be in a much better situation than we are now. So you're absolutely right. We really are doing everything we can to encourage people that have been blessed by liberty in America and who love America and love God.

You've got to get into the public square. You've got to pay attention. Because if you're not in the public square, people with a much different idea of what America should be will take our place and they will lead the country in directions that I think will really end up betraying our Founding Fathers, and it will condemn our own children and grandchildren, unfortunately, to lesser lives because they won't enjoy the freedoms we did.

Cornel Potra: That's so true.

Gary Bauer: You're in Romania. You're suffering under this oppression. You had run-ins with the government several times. But then it got to the point where, as you said, you just had to get out of the country. And were you able to come directly to the United States, or was it a circuitous journey before you could get here?

Cornel Potra: So I escaped Romania in August of 1988. I crossed the border from Romania into former Yugoslavia, and I've spent several days in the cornfields hiding from the

Yugoslavian police. They were catching escapees from Romania and sending them back. But by God's grace, they did not catch me. I escaped from Yugoslavia into Austria. In Austria, I applied for political asylum.

And after I've spent a year in the refugee camp in Austria, I was able to be granted asylum and come to the United States. June 13th, 1989, I arrived in the United States Kennedy Airport. A day not to be forgotten, June 13th, 1989. That was an incredible day for me.

And I have to say that while I was in the refugee camp, and many other times when I would think about the freedoms of this country, I thought when I arrive in the United States, I will literally kiss the ground of that nation because I wanted to be free. On that day of June 13th when I arrived in New York Kennedy Airport, the floors were too dirty to be kissed, but I did it later on.

I have to say that I fell in love with this country, and I am so grateful that the United States of America accepted me. And now I am a citizen. My wife is a citizen. My children were born here in the United States, and we are enjoying the freedoms of this country that we still have. But if we don't fight for them to preserve them, we will soon lose them.

One other detail about New York, I had to change the gates to catch another plane to Chicago, and I went to the counter to ask a question and the lady answered me back in English. And I thought, is this true? And I thought, whoa! My English that I studied in Romania works. She answered back in English.

Gary Bauer:

You did what so many millions of people have done over the history of America in coming here legally. One of the things, as I mentioned in the beginning of our conversation, is that in addition to being a pastor, you went on and studied the law, you passed the bar, and you have a legal practice now that specializes in helping people navigate America's laws so that they can legally come to this great country of opportunity because you followed the laws, you followed the right process.

Talk a little about why it's so important both for acceptance in America, but also for those who want to come here that the laws of our country ought to be followed if you want to come here to be eventually a good American citizen.

Cornel Potra:

That's right, Gary. Number one, I do believe in the rule of law. The reason why this country is a great country is because we have laws. And when we fail to obey the laws, we will fail to be a nation, to continue to be a nation that is desired to come to and live in here. The reason why so many other countries in the world do not prosper is because although they have laws, the laws are not obeyed.

One of those laws is the immigration law in the United States, especially the asylum. The asylum application is based on fear of persecution in your home country because of political views or because of religious views. However, the

interpretation of this law today opened the gate to so many people to come to the borders of the United States and claim asylum for any reason in the world, for crimes committed against them in their home countries.

But this is not a valid claim for asylum and the interpretation of the current laws is skewed, and many people take advantage of the interpretation. We have seen millions of people come to the United States through the open border policies. My question is how many of those people do not wish well to this nation? How many of those people actually are preparing to attack this nation?

How many of those people are not friendly toward the American people? How many of those people are ready to take up arms against the leaders of this country? I have a deep concern for such policies. And we hear the news about all kinds of people coming through the open borders right now into the United States. I do believe, Gary, that we do have laws in place, but we're not obeying those laws.

We're not playing by the book. We are allowing all kinds of people to come to this country. And my question is, how can you remove millions of people who entered the United States illegally through a legal process or the due process of law? And then another question is, do people who are here in the United States illegally, do they have the right to the due process of law?

And how will the immigration courts look like with 20 million people on their dockets? It's impossible to handle legally. All these people who entered the United States, we don't know who they are. We don't know where they are. They may not even show up in the court system to present a case whether they are eligible or not for that which they claimed when they entered the United States.

So the laws of the United States are so important, but we see a departure from the laws. We see how the people do not want to obey the current laws, but the people want to just invade, I think this is an appropriate word, a nation and come to this country. So the question is, what is the solution to this big problem? This is a huge problem not only in the United States, but in other parts of the world.

Can we use the current laws like I did and like many other people from Eastern Europe, from Europe to come to this country and live peacefully in this country and become citizens and obey the laws and follow the principles of the law in this country and work hard and pay our taxes and respect the property of others, respect the rights of others? How can we enforce such laws to millions of people who are not familiar with this culture, with these laws in this country? We are in a big mess, Gary.

Gary Bauer:

Cornel, that was eloquent and it really points up that a lot of the critics for those of us that want to secure border, the other side will say, "Oh, you just don't like immigrants. You're a bigot. You've got hateful feelings about other people from

other cultures." No, that's not true. And one of the ways you can see it's not true is that legal immigrants from many different cultures, people like you, Cornel, are sometimes now the greatest critics of the illegal immigration that has overwhelmed our nation.

So more people need to hear your message, and we thank you so much for being with us on Family Talk to share it. Cornel, this has been a great conversation with you, and I wonder if I could ask you to close out our time together with a prayer on whatever might be on your heart.

Cornel Potra:

Thank you, Gary. Father in heaven, you are a mighty God. You are the God of all ages. You are the God of history. We live in this time of history, your story that you are telling us, a story of redemption. In the face of so much evil in the world, we come before you, Father. And we pray that you will preserve the gift of life in many people in this country and in the world, the unborn babies. We pray for life that this country will continue to respect and honor that which you alone give.

That is the gift of life. We also pray, Father, that you'll preserve this nation, protect this country from the perils of so many dangers and risks that we have taken upon ourselves. With so many undocumented people in this country, we pray for your grace and mercy and wisdom and discernment and knowledge and understanding how to treat this flood of people that came to this country. I pray for the elections coming up in November.

I pray, Father, that you'll put on the hearts of the people who love this nation and the future of this nation to go and vote. I pray that this generation will leave a legacy of faith in you and trust in you. I pray for a return of the American nation to you. I pray for a revival in this country. I pray that we will forsake our wicked ways, that we'll come before you in humility, in confession of our sins.

I pray that we will forsake our wicked ways and seek your face and you will heal this land, and you will continue to this nation so that this nation can bless other nations in the world. We pray for Israel, we pray for the peace of this small nation in Middle East for your glory and preserve your remnant, the church. I pray that we will not let our eyes rest until we see your kingdom. May your will be done in our hearts, in our lives. Amen.

Gary Bauer:

Amen. Thank you so much, Cornel. It's been great to be with you, and thank you all out there for tuning into Family Talk. And come back to be with us again.

Roger Marsh:

Cornel Potra certainly has a magnificent story about getting to America, doesn't he? If you'd like to learn more about Cornel or the Potra Law firm, just visit drjamesdobson.org/familytalk and click the links at the bottom of the page. Now, as we've been hearing over the past couple of programs here on Family Talk, this upcoming election season is incredibly important.

You can stay up to date on election related issues by visiting drjamesdobson.org/countdown-to-decision-2024. Once you're there, you can sign up for a free downloadable voter guide, which is especially helpful if you live in a swing state. You can also reserve your Faith Vote stickers. These come packs of 25, and we'll be happy to send a pack to your home as our way of thanking you for your donation of any amount in support of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute today.

So go to drjamesdobson.org/countdown-to-decision-2024 and reserve your pack of 25 Faith Vote stickers today. Well, I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for making Family Talk a part of your day. And be sure to join us again next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

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