



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Living the Good Life – Part 1

Guest(s): Chuck Colson

Air Date: July 6, 2026

- Dr. James Dobson: Welcome everyone to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute, supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson, and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.
- Roger Marsh: Well, welcome to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. I'm the vice president of content here at the JDFI. I'm also the executive producer and co-host of the Family Talk program. Now, today's broadcast is one that you are really going to enjoy because it features a classic conversation with our own Dr. James Dobson and his dear friend, Chuck Colson. We've all heard people talk about the good life, but what exactly does it really mean? Does it involve career success? Maybe it involves a house on a beach somewhere, watching your children flourish? Well, on today's edition of Family Talk, we're going to hear part one of a conversation Dr. Dobson recorded with his good friend Chuck Colson, the founder of Prison Fellowship, who is the author of the book called *The Good Life*. It's a challenging and inspiring conversation about purpose, meaning, and truth. And I know for me personally, having worked with Chuck Colson for about five years prior to working with Dr. James Dobson, these are two of the finest men I ever met and had the privilege to work with, and I'm so grateful that they are now reunited in Heaven, enjoying their eternal reward. But for right now, we get to enjoy their fabulous conversation, kicking off right now on today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.
- Dr. James Dobson: Chuck Colson has been our guest for more than I think 24 years since he first came by and we got acquainted, and he's become almost like a brother to me. We talk regularly on the phone about events and issues that are occurring in the country, and we get together whenever we can. And today is one of those times. I once flew to Florida. We were talking about this at lunchtime. I once flew down to Florida and spent an entire day. with Chuck and Patty talking about issues we care about, sharing ideas, and praying together. And I still, Chuck, have the notes from that day. I'm sure you recall it as well.
- Chuck Colson: I have great memories of that day.
- Dr. James Dobson: Chuck is a former Presidential aide to Richard Nixon and founder of the International Ministry Prison Fellowship. He's the author of 23 books, a very popular speaker. He holds a B.A. degree from Brown University and a law degree from George Washington University and is a constitutional scholar,

constitutional lawyer. Chuck has been married to Patty, a great lady, for 41 years. the father of three children and has five grandchildren. You could take the whole program talking about the things that Chuck has done.

Chuck Colson: It's nice to be this far along in my life that you get an introduction like that and they don't mention you're an ex-convict.

Dr. James Dobson: You're actually getting away from Watergate a little bit, aren't you?

Chuck Colson: No, no. I was chased down by the press in the feverish pursuit. I said to many of them what I'd say to you, I'd say to anybody, and that is thank God for Watergate. I look back now at how God has used what happened in my life when I was President Nixon's assistant, thought I was on the top of the world. I end up in a prison cell thinking my life is over. No, in the sovereignty of God, He chose to use my defeat to do some magnificent things around the world. So I'm grateful for what I've been through.

Dr. James Dobson: That links directly into the title and the content of your new book, *The Good Life: Seeking Purpose, Meaning, and Truth in Your Life*. You wrote this, I know, because many, many people in this country and in Western countries especially, but around the world, don't know why they have meaning and don't know what is true.

Chuck Colson: It's the biggest thing going on in America and Western Europe today, the search for meaning. What is it? And you can understand why it is. Particularly the polls show it among young people and college students and teenagers. They're saying, what's the meaning of life? What's my purpose? Why am I here? I mean, look at Rick Warren's book, 22 million copies sold of that book. He's hitting a raw nerve. People are asking that question. Why are they asking it? Because they're growing up in a vacuum.

You talk to college students today, they're taught there is no truth, there is no meaning, life is all random, it doesn't make any sense, you just live for the moment, overcome the nothingness by your own heroic individualism, and they're not buying that because something in them, I call it the Imago Dei, is telling them that isn't so, that's a lie. So they're searching for answers. And what I try to do in this book, I kind of look back on my life and try to see what really counted, what really mattered the most, what was the most important thing, what lessons have I learned since I wrote *Born Again*? This book, in that sense, is more personal than any book I've written except *Born Again*, because it's kind of reflecting on my experiences, experiences of others I've known, all leading to the question of how do you find meaning and purpose in life?

Dr. James Dobson: Well, let's talk about the good life. What in the world is it? How do you define it?

Chuck Colson: Well, it's not what people think it is. What people think it is when you hear that is the Budweiser good life. It's money, power, possessions, leisure, everything

focused on me, which is what the culture is telling us. And as you'll see in this book, it's a total dead end. I use the story of Dennis Kozlowski, who started out as a poor kid and got the scholarship to college and gets to the head of a major corporation and then milks it blind and ends up with a \$2 million party for his trophy wife in Sardinia. It's got to be the most barren way to end your life. Or Jack Welch, the iconic head of General Electric, who when asked after open heart surgery, here's a guy who made \$500 million as CEO of GE, one of the top business leaders in the market. Someone asked him, "Did you have an epiphany during your heart surgery?" And he said, "Yeah, I did. He said, I vowed never to let a bottle of wine costing less than \$100 cross my lips." What a barren way to look at life. I just think it's a dead end. And I think you find the meaning in life by giving yourself away, not by satisfying yourself. In other words, the things which you think will gratify yourself.

Biggest day for me in my ministry was winning the Templeton Prize and going to Buckingham Palace and a million dollars which went to the ministry. But I've forgotten that, and I don't even know where the medal is that I got that day from Prince Philip. But I keep letters from inmates whose lives have been changed, and I share some of them in the book. The most gratifying thing at 73 years old is to be able to think that your life was used to help others. And I take such pride in the people I've worked with and known. A fellow who was in the middle of a riot, and I met him, and he was leading the riot out in Walla Walla, Washington. I preached that night, and he came to Christ, and then he led a whole movement to turn that prison around. He got out of prison. He was the toughest guy in the system He got out of prison and spent the last 10 years of his life before he died discipling disadvantaged kids in the streets of Dallas. Those things give you great pleasure. That's a great reward. That's the good life.

Dr. James Dobson: You know, Chuck, it's my impression that A sizable number of people, maybe not the majority, but a sizable number of people who are midlife and beyond, have some vague remembrance. of the value system that you and I believe, and that there is meaning to life, and it's not all found in money and the things that people are chasing. Doesn't it break your heart as it does mine that the college students and high school students that are coming along now have had no exposure to that value system, and they have no clue as to why life has meaning.

Chuck Colson: Yeah. Even the boomers, Jim, you're absolutely right. Even the boomers have a heritage, a Christian heritage in their background. They carry that legacy with them. So they've got something to refer to. The Generation X and the younger people have no basis of reference because they've been told by every professor, every teacher, that there is no truth. Nothing is knowable. And so they drift through life with no sense of commitment or attachment to anything. But the good news is that, as you and I know, the Imago Dei is planted in us. The image of God is in us. We are asking questions. There's a divine restlessness, as one scholar put it. There is what the study at Dartmouth showed some years ago called Wired to Connect. I don't know if you remember that study, but it

showed that people are basically genetically disposed to want relationships and genetically disposed to be seeking God.

And so young people have this in them, and something is making them very restless. Something's making them very dissatisfied with what they're getting. They have no basis to fall back on, as you and I did growing up or our kids did growing up. But still they're asking the questions. That's one of the reasons I wrote this book.

Dr. James Dobson: Wasn't it St. Francis of Assisi who said that there is a God-shaped vacuum inside of us and that we're never comfortable until it is filled by a relationship?

Chuck Colson: Francis of Assisi said some things like that. The most common quote is Pascal who talked about a God-shaped hole inside human beings. I didn't say it exactly that way, but that was the point. But I think people through the ages, I think all of the great Christian writers and thinkers have recognized that there is this sense within people that they're searching for something more. St. Anselm's famous formulation, God is that greater than that which you can conceive. We know that to be so. People know that to be so. I wrote this book. That's why I think a book like this is so needed not only to equip those younger people, not only to give answers to those younger people, but to equip us older folks to be able to answer the questions of the younger people. I consider this book to be the most accessible and best work on apologetics I've done because it goes through a reasoned defense. Because once you've gotten to the point in your reasoning where you realize that the object of life is to give your life away, then what you want to be sure is you're giving it to the truth.

Dr. James Dobson: All right, now let's focus on what you just said. The object of life is to give yourself to others.

Chuck Colson: Right. The purpose of life, which will fulfill you most, obviously, the most important other is God.

Dr. James Dobson: Elaborate on that for those young people who have heard and believed the notion that there is no God, there is no design, there is no designer, there is no destination but the grave. We have no meaning. There is no truth, no absolute truth, no truth of any type. It's all relative. It's all an individual perception. And they're out chasing the good life. They're coming out of college, perhaps, and they're now going to move into a profession, maybe it's a medical profession, maybe who knows what it is, and that if they reach the goals that they've set for themselves there and if they become financially successful, that they're going to be fulfilled. Destroy that myth because it is a myth.

Chuck Colson: Well, it's going to destroy itself for them because they're going to confront reality. They're going to discover that a world without rules is a world you can't live in. What they discover is chaos, and they suddenly discover people do things to them they don't like. And then they say, it shouldn't be that way, but what they were taught was it can be any way everybody chooses. So they run

into reality themselves in the course of their lives. They also discover that all the hedonism on college campuses and the hooking up and all the stuff that goes on is bankrupt, that they feel a loss of self-worth and self-dignity. It's dehumanizing. And they soon find that out. I tell the story in this book. It was a very poignant one of John Ehrlichman, who was very close to me in the White House. Older listeners will remember that name. He was one of the handful of people closest to the president.

Dr. James Dobson: Ian Haldeman.

Chuck Colson: Ian Haldeman, the Berlin Wall. And John Ehrlichman, he got all the through Watergate, ended up being tried, went to prison. He left his wife in the middle of the trial, got remarried. Went off to live on a mountaintop in Santa Fe. Got remarried again, divorced and remarried again. Ended up alone because he had shut everybody else out of his life, believed there was no purpose to it all. Was in desperate pursuit of self-vindication. It was like Augustine said, "Lord, spare me the lust of self-vindication." He couldn't defend himself. He couldn't prove himself. I ministered to him just before he died in a little nursing home in Atlanta. It was the most pathetic sight I've ever seen. Here was a guy who was a Christian scientist, so he couldn't believe in sin, so he could never reconcile what happened to him in the White House. He'd cast everybody out of his life, and I was the only person that came back to see him. His family had left him, everything. It was the most tragic picture, but it's a picture that is a parable for all young people today. If you go through life trying to vindicate yourself, trying to prove yourself, trying to gratify yourself, and disregard others, you will die alone in a nursing home.

Dr. James Dobson: Let's personalize it. Personalize it, Chuck, because you went to law school and then your professional career took off and began to develop. You wound up in the White House very close to Richard Nixon. In fact, your office was just a few feet away from him. You were probably the most powerful person in the White House. And you could have, one occasion you shared with me, you could pick up the phone and call for a Marine helicopter or send a detachment of Marines anywhere in the world. You had all that power and the influence on the most powerful man in the world. Were you satisfied with yourself at that time? Did you have the good life?

Chuck Colson: No, I certainly did not have the good life. I was a kid growing up in the Depression. Nobody in my family had gone to college. I earned scholarships. I was officer in the Marine Corps in the Korean War. I ended up youngest administrative assistant in the Senate. I was bound and determined to get right to the top. And at age 38, I was in the office next to the president looking over the south lawn of the White House. And I thought to myself a number of times, boy, my grandfather, who was an immigrant to this country, would certainly be pleased if he saw what could happen. This is the American dream fulfilled.

When the election in 1972 was over, we'd won by a landslide. Watergate was beginning. I was beginning to feel really uncomfortable with who I was. Even

before I thought I was going to be on trial, well before it, life was empty. What do you do after you've done that and you're 40 years old? And what other mountains are you going to conquer? And I had hurt a lot of people in my life, and I thought back on it. I was coming under conviction, and I didn't know it until I was witnessed to by a friend that year I got out of the White House. Witnessed to by a friend who read to me from C.S. Lewis's wonderful little book, *Mere Christianity*. And I was struck, overwhelmingly struck with my own sinfulness and realized for the first time in my life what the gospel was, that Christ died on the cross so I could be forgiven. If it weren't for that, Jim Dobson, I tell you and everybody listening to us, I'd be dead today because I would have suffocated in the stench of my own sins. So, yeah, I know the good life. I know how bankrupt the so-called good life is. And I know where the good life really is. I mean, I write this book as a plea to people. A good life is not in gratifying yourself. It is in helping others. But you've got to be in pursuit of truth.

Dr. James Dobson: It's an oxymoron to say, and yet it's true, that the good life for you more or less started in prison.

Chuck Colson: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. That's why on all these interviews I've been doing this year, I've been saying to people, thank God for Watergate. They'd say, are you trying to revise history when I said that Mark Felt was not a hero for leaking things to Woodward and Bernstein? They'd say, "You're trying to revise history?" I'd say, "No, I thank God for Watergate. "Well, you don't really literally mean that." "Yes, I do literally mean that, because that got my attention. God was able to speak to me. I wouldn't have heard Him before. I was too hard-headed, too prideful, too stubborn, too determined to get to the top. Finally, I heard God's voice, and I realized what my life had become." And thank God, look what's happened. We're in 108 countries around the world with ministry to prisoners, the least of these in our society, the most thrilling thing in the world.

Dr. James Dobson: What was it like for you, Chuck, to have all that power and influence and to be eminently successful? in the political realm and to find yourself in a prison where you were strip searched going in and in this tiny cell where guards came by and shined a light in your eyes at night. What was that like?

Chuck Colson: Well, I talk about that in the book, Jim, quite a bit in this book because I can reflect on it now with a little bit of detachment. You know, I never really was troubled by being locked up because I'd been in the Marines and I'd lived in everything. I was able to handle it. There were two things that bothered you. One is you're separated from your family. I mean, I know what Wired to Connect means. You really care about your kids and your wife. You're passionately concerned about your family. And the other thing was I thought I'll never do anything significant again. I thought my life was at an end. I write in this book that so much of life is a paradox. You know, you can't know the good until you realize how bad you are. You can't do something really good until you've been broken and discover where the real good is. And out of the worst defeat in my life has come the greatest victory, God's victory. It's not very pleasant to be going through tough times.

I've been going through kind of a tough one this year with two children with cancer. That's about as tough as it gets. That's tougher than prison. And there are times when God seems kind of far away in the midst of really tough times. But I've discovered he isn't far away. I've discovered God is God. He doesn't depend upon my emotions. Or my feelings at the moment. So what you do is remember who God is and remember that this life is but a moment. And remember that what really matters is not the difficult time you're going through, but how it affects you. In other words, how do you react to it? If you react to it with trust in God and a trust in His sovereignty, you're going to come out better for it. And sometimes the very worst things that ever could happen to you are going to turn out to be the very best. And you're going to see how God's redeeming plan. He redeems suffering. Every bit of suffering I've gone through, He's redeemed. He's used it for His purposes.

Dr. James Dobson: You had cancer yourself.

Chuck Colson: I had what we thought was cancer at the time. It turned out to be benign, but I didn't know that for about five years. But, yes, I had two-thirds of my stomach out and almost died from an infection in the hospital. So I write about that as well because it's a great example of providence, what happened when I was in that hospital. In a hospital suite at Georgetown Hospital in Washington, right above me, I heard of the chairs going and moving all the time. After I'd been in the hospital about three weeks and was finally mobile and with an IV because of the infection, tubes hanging out of me on all sides, the head of the hospital came one day and he said, "I never knew what you went through in Watergate, Mr. Colson," but he said, "I just threw that fellow Bob Woodward from the *Washington Post* out of the room upstairs." I said, "Whose room upstairs was it?" He said, "Bill Casey. head of the CIA. He tried to get in." You may remember that Woodward later wrote he got in and recorded what Casey said. Well, Bill Casey was an old friend of mine, and so my wife called Sophia, who was Bill's wife, and immediately he had me come up. Turned out on the logs, I was only one of five people to get in his room while he was in the hospital. He had had major brain surgery. He was not able to talk. When I walked in, he went, smiling and grunting, but he could not get words out.

Dr. James Dobson: And yet, Bob Woodward told the world that he had that last conversation.

Chuck Colson: That was untrue, just plain untrue. And I testified to that later when Bob Woodward's book came out. But the neat thing was that Bill was an old friend of mine, and I walked in, and he couldn't talk to me, but tears were rolling down his eyes when I was there. And we talked for about an hour. And at the end of it, I said, "Bill, I know you're a Catholic and a strong believer. You know that cross up on the wall?" There was a crucifix at Georgetown Hospital. I said, "You know what that means, that Jesus died for your sins and you're forgiven and you personally can have eternal life." Now the tears are flowing down his cheeks. We had a fabulous time of prayer together holding hands in that little room. And I often thought that had to be an important moment in Bill Casey's life. And I wouldn't have been there if I hadn't had an infection, which kept me in the

hospital for 28 days. I'd have been out in five days. So God knows what He's doing. And if you're suffering right now and you're listening to this broadcast, be patient, trust in God. You will see, I promise you, in due course, that that suffering will be redeemed as hard as it is right now. The important thing is how it affects you and what you do in response to it, not the thing which is happening to you.

Dr. James Dobson: I knew this program was going to get away from us, and it has, and our time is gone. Chuck, we've got to continue this conversation. There's so much in this book. And the title of it is *The Good Life: Seeking Purpose, Meaning, and Truth in Your Life*. If we're talking to people right now, and I know we are, by the tens of thousands, maybe more than that, who are just plodding through life and have no idea why. They have no sense of meaning and purpose. I'm still aware that there are many people that listen who do not know Jesus Christ. They have never had an encounter with Him and never had a reason to that they've understood. And this is a book that will get at that issue. Chuck, this book really is an evangelistic tool in its own way, isn't it?

Chuck Colson: Oh, absolutely. I wrote it so believers could be equipped with the arguments to defend their faith, but also so that you could give it to a non-believer. It doesn't quote the Bible until you get near the end of the book. Give it to a nonbeliever and tell him to read it. And I think on its own it will lead him to the Lord.

Dr. James Dobson: Chuck, this is an outstanding book. I hope it has the same kind of success that you've had with so many other books, *Born Again* and *Loving God* and many of your earlier books, which really dealt with the passion that's within you for Jesus Christ. Thanks for being with us today. And we will pick it up next time.

Roger Marsh: Well, what a powerful conversation between two dear and longtime friends, Dr. James Dobson and Chuck Colson. On today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, Chuck reminded us of a truth that's easy to forget, that the good life isn't found in money, power, or possessions. It's found in giving ourselves away to others, and most of all, to God. Now, if you'd like to learn more about Chuck Colson's book, *The Good Life*, or to hear today's program again, just visit jdfi.org. And as I mentioned at the start of the program, Dr. Dobson went home to be with the Lord, of course, last August 21st. Chuck Colson preceded him in his eternal reward reception back in 2012. So what a glorious reunion those two friends have had being with the Lord right now in His presence full time.

Well, you know, I've got some exciting news to share with you as we wrap up today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. In honor of America's 250th anniversary, right now we have a special July matching grant in effect. Thanks to some incredibly generous friends of our ministry, every gift you give to the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute this month will be matched dollar for dollar up to \$250,000. As a listener-supported ministry, we rely on friends like you to keep these important conversations on the air and to provide the many other resources that the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute creates to strengthen families here in America and literally all around the world. Now, you can make a

secure donation when you visit jdfi.org. That's jdfi.org, or drjamesdobson.org. You can also call a member of our constituent care team. That number is 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. Or if you prefer, you can drop us a line through the U.S. Postal Service. Our ministry mailing address is the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code 80949. Once again, our ministry mailing address is the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, or you can just use those initials JDFI for short. P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, 80949.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh and thanking you so much for listening to Family Talk today. And from all of us here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, we invite you to join us again next time for part two of this conversation featuring Dr. James Dobson and his dear friend, Chuck Colson. They'll be discussing living the good life on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

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