

Republican Presidential Candidates Discuss Faith, Family

There were tears, testimonies and talk of Jesus over the weekend in Iowa. And it wasn't a revival meeting—it was a presidential forum.

The Republican presidential candidates looked like one big, happy family as they sat around a Thanksgiving table, talking about God's hand in their lives.

"In every person's heart, in every person's soul, there is a hole that can only be filled by the Lord Jesus Christ," Texas Gov. Rick Perry said.

They also talked about how their faith intersects with their views on public policy.

"We have for the first time in the history of our country, taxpayer-subsidized abortion because of Obamacare," Rep. Michele Bachmann, R-Minn., told the audience.

Romney Skips Forum

Missing from this Thanksgiving gathering was national GOP frontrunner Mitt Romney, who was invited but has mostly shied away from evangelical events like the Iowa forum.

Instead, the former Massachusetts governor spent the day campaigning in New Hampshire.

Co-frontrunner, Newt Gingrich, talked to CBN News about Romney's absence from the event.

"Everybody has to make their own decision. He and Huntsman, for their own reasons, decided that they're not playing Iowa, and Romney sort of plays like he's playing Iowa, but he hasn't

come to a single major thing here except the debates,” the former House speaker said.

“I suspect that his consultants are telling him, ‘You have so much money, you can drown the other guys,’ and they believe that advertising replaces people,” Gingrich speculated. “I don’t believe that.”

Anti-Romney Vote

All of the candidates on the stage this past weekend in Iowa were appealing to the folks in the pews: evangelicals.

Because evangelicals make up nearly 60 percent of Iowa voters, many of these candidates have been called anti-Romney candidates. What they really want to be is the evangelical candidate.

But so far, voters haven’t made up their minds.

“We’ve been following the candidates pretty closely and I think I didn’t hear any surprises,” one forum attendee told CBN News.

“We want a Christian in office, and I’m afraid some of those votes are going to be divided because we have three really strong Christian candidates tonight,” another person said. “And there’s a certain one that didn’t come tonight, and I’m afraid he might win because our votes are divided.”

However, some attendees told CBN News they like to hear candidates talking boldly about their faith and their values.

“The way you fight back is not be afraid to express your faith in any setting, rather than worrying about the political correctness police,” Herman Cain told the audience.

“Somebody’s values are going to decide what Congress and the president of the United States does, and the question is whose values?” Perry asked.

Candidates Get Personal

Many evangelicals in attendance also said they liked getting to know the candidates on a more personal level. Some got emotional.

Cain recalled his wife's devotion during his stage four cancer diagnosis.

"I said, 'I can do this.' She said, 'We can do this,'" Cain sobbed to applause from the audience.

Rick Santorum shared his young special needs daughter's fight for life.

"I prayed in that moment, 'Please, please, let her live,'" he recalled.

Other candidates laughed, looking back on their lives.

"Are you prouder that you are a dually elected member of Congress or are you prouder of your medical profession?" forum moderator Dr. Frank Luntz asked Rep. Ron Paul, R-Texas.

"Oh, medical profession, by far," Paul answered.

"I think there were about 13 in my graduating class, and any of you that are interested, I graduated in the top 10 in my class, by the way," Perry quipped.

Iowa voters will have the chance to see the candidates take the debate stage a few more times before Jan. 3, the big day of the Iowa caucuses.