

Rick Perry Shares Faith Journey at Liberty University

For one of the first times since he announced his run for presidency, Texas Gov. Rick Perry talked about his “faith journey” Wednesday at Liberty University.

Perry, the front-runner for the GOP nomination for president, spoke for 20 minutes to more than 10,000 students in Liberty’s convocation, a tri-weekly gathering of the student body in the Vines Center, the school’s basketball arena. Media presence was heavy, with representatives from major news agencies including *The Washington Post*, *New York Times*, NBC, ABC, FOX News and C-SPAN, which recorded the entire event. International press from Korea, France and Germany also attended.

Perry’s talk was filled with advice and encouragement for students, weaving in tales of his humble past as a member of a Texas farm family, and including his own college experience at Texas A&M University.

Growing up, he said he did not know as a child that his family was “not wealthy in a material sense; I know we were rich in a lot of things that really mattered, in a spiritual way.”

He told of not having a clear direction for his life until he learned the lessons of Scripture.

“I wasn’t one of those people who knew at the age of 12 that he wanted to be doctor, a lawyer, or for that matter a governor or a president. I spent many a night pondering my purpose, talking to God, wondering what to do with this one life ... what I learned as I wrestled with God was I didn’t have to have all the answers, that would be revealed to me in due time, and that I needed to trust Him.”

He said his “faith journey” was not about “someone who turned to God because I wanted to—it was because I had nowhere else to turn.”

He was 27, had been an officer in the U.S. Air Force, “telling men and women what to do” but was “lost spiritually and emotionally—and I didn’t know how to fix it.”

Except for the sounds of camera shutters, the arena was quiet as Perry explained what a faith in God means to his life.

“As spiritual beings we are meant to live in relationship with our Creator and with one another—and the happiest moments I’ve ever experienced are when I am in communion with God and in community with others,” he said.

He encouraged students to trust God as he has: “Do not fret if you don’t know your place in the world yet or what you want to be someday. ... Trust that God wouldn’t have put you here unless He had a unique plan for your life. ... He knows you by name; you’re never alone, even when you feel like it, and he doesn’t require perfect people to execute His perfect plan.”

He cited Paul writing to Timothy in the Bible, warning students not to “live in fear; live in faith. Don’t fear the judgment of others or the uncertainty of the future. Don’t muzzle your voice because you’re young. ... You have the right like every American to speak your mind, you have the right to insist on change, to tell the people in power that you will not have your inheritance spent ... Your voice matters; use it. This country is your country as well.”

He received the loudest applause toward the end, when he said, “Don’t leave it to a bunch of Washington politicians to tell you how to live your life.”

“This is your future we are debating today; don’t be silent,” he told students. “When you use your voice, let your words be characterized by grace, humility and truth.”

With Perry's visit, Liberty has hosted four of the eight candidates for the GOP nomination in convocation. Herman Cain spoke in 2009; Newt Gingrich, who has visited Liberty several times, last spoke in October 2010; and Ron Paul spoke in 2008 when he was a candidate for president. Minnesota Rep. Michele Bachmann is scheduled to speak at Liberty on Sept. 28.

"We invite all of the candidates to speak here," said Chancellor Jerry Falwell Jr. "We invited President Obama when he was a candidate; he sent a surrogate. We want our students to be able to take advantage of the fact that we are the largest Christian university—and one of the ways we allow them to do that is bringing in national leaders, letting them hear firsthand where they stand on the issues."

He said Liberty's nonprofit status does not allow it to endorse any candidate and he has not made a personal endorsement. Perry was invited before he announced his candidacy in August, Falwell said.