

How Jerry Falwell Is Training Champions for Christ at Liberty University

Earlier this week, I had the privilege of interviewing Liberty University President Jerry Falwell for my “Strang Report” podcast. *Charisma* magazine highlighted Falwell and Liberty in our July cover story, “Training Champions for Christ,” where we delve into how one of the world’s largest Christian universities is raising up the next generation of believers. If you don’t already subscribe to *Charisma*, [click here](#) to get that issue.

Recently, though, *The New York Times* painted an unattractive picture of Liberty, making several claims Falwell says are untrue. I asked him about this in a sidebar to the cover story in the July issue. Falwell points out that the article was written by ProPublica, which he says is owned by George Soros. Instead of suing *The New York Times*, though, Falwell wrote an op-ed sharing his side, which we posted on [.](#)

The *Times* article did, however, get one thing right: Liberty is huge—but it hasn’t always been.

Falwell’s father, Jerry Falwell Sr., founded Liberty in 1971. I had the pleasure of knowing Falwell Sr., and I visited him at the university in the late 1980s. Falwell Sr. originally named the school Lynchburg Baptist College, and it had only 154 students. Since that time, the school—and the Falwells—has been through tremendous trials, including almost closing Liberty due to its \$110 million debt in the early 1990s. In 1996, Falwell Sr. felt prompted to fast for 40 days and pray that God would remove Liberty’s debt burden in 1997-1998. He then fasted and prayed another 40 days—and God provided. The school soon after received a cash gift that was big enough to

pay off the entire debt.

Now, Liberty has 110,000 students, 15,000 of whom are on campus. I asked Falwell Jr. in our interview what he thought was the driving force behind Liberty's incredible growth. Falwell replied that the school's goal sets itself apart from other Christian colleges.

"It's the only one I know of that set out from day one, in 1971, to become for evangelical Christians what Brigham Young is for Mormons, what Notre Dame is for Catholics—a world-class university, with world-class facilities and NCAA Division I sports," Falwell says. "In the early '70s, my father was talking about playing USC, Alabama [and] Notre Dame in football. And everybody thought he was crazy because we didn't even have a campus until 1977."

Falwell says the university rented both old buildings around town and rickety buses for the first several years. But the school's humble beginnings didn't deter its founder's vision. Falwell says that's the reason the school has succeeded. Liberty offers something most evangelical schools never intended to offer—or thought it was possible to offer.

But even more impressive than its number of students is Liberty's ability to raise generations of young people who pursue Christ and thrive in various fields. The common slogan at Liberty is "If it's Christian, it should be better," and the school's goal is to graduate students who live that way. But that's hard to do in a culture that's rigged against Christian education, Falwell says.

Listen to my podcast to hear how Liberty is overcoming the odds to raise up the next generation for Christ.