

# Jerry Falwell's Legacy

**If someone was a friend of Christ's, he was a friend of Jerry Falwell's.**

Jerry Falwell Sr. left a great legacy when he died unexpectedly in May. The son of an agnostic and the grandson of an atheist, he became one of the most famous preachers in American history.

He built the largest evangelical university in America in Lynchburg, Virginia, the small town where he grew up. He also co-founded the Moral Majority, an organization credited with helping elect Ronald Reagan president of the United States—a remarkable leader who changed the course of this nation.

Thousands of people attended Falwell's funeral, including many Christian leaders. But of those who addressed the audience, none were prominent figures other than Franklin Graham and Southern Baptist leader Jerry Vines. Instead Falwell was eulogized by long-term friends and family members who told of his deep love for his children and grandchildren and his wife of 49 years, Macel. They talked about his rock-solid integrity, his sense of humor and the fact that many people considered him a best friend.

I had the privilege of meeting Falwell at the White House in 1988. As recently as last summer I interacted with him through Christians United for Israel. But I really got to know him when I made contact with him through my friend Elmer Towns, who helped him found Liberty University more than 35 years ago. Falwell graciously welcomed me to Lynchburg, and we formed a longstanding bond of friendship.

But I came away from that first visit with more than a new friend. I could sense there was a revival in Lynchburg, and I wrote a column telling about Falwell's having engaged in two extended fasts that had a profound impact on him personally and that set the stage for a spiritual revival on the Liberty University campus. I also learned how open he was to the things of the Spirit. You can read that column and all our archived articles on Falwell at

At the time, I hosted a weekly program on TBN and made a second trip to Liberty to interview Falwell. This week I watched the two 30-minute shows that came from that interview and was touched again by his warmth, humor and spiritual depth.

He told me that his wife has a collection of all the political cartoons about him—many of them mean-spirited. He said the worse the cartoon was, the more he liked adding it to the collection. I made a mental note to remember that when I read nasty letters to the editor!

He talked about going on a 40-day fast for a great financial need in his ministry and finding out that the Lord wanted to do something deep in his own life. I asked him what the Lord showed him about himself, and he listed arrogance and self-assertiveness.

His example influenced me when I went on a 40-day total fast. But I don't think I would be as open as Falwell was to talk about it on national television!

He mentioned the PTL scandal and said that he had been reconciled not only to Jim Bakker but also to Bakker's son, Jamie Charles, who had "hard feelings" toward him. I admired the fact that Falwell considered the feelings of Bakker's son

and went to the lengths he did to reach out to him.

But that was typical of Falwell. He was more than a man who grew a big church. He also had a godly reputation.

In my interview Falwell admitted that he had learned through the years to be a bridge-builder. If someone was a friend of Christ's, he was a friend of Jerry Falwell's, he said.

Now the university will be led by his older son, Jerry Jr., and Thomas Road Baptist Church will be pastored by his younger son, Jonathan. His daughter, Jeannie Falwell Savas, is a surgeon. The success of his children and the devotion of his wife say a lot about the type of man Falwell was in his private life.

The good news is that his ministry will go on. And despite all the problems in America today, I have no doubt our country is better off than it would have been if he had never been born or had refused to follow the call of God on his life. He inspired countless people like me to do what we can to make a difference.

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Stephen Strang, the founder of Charisma, invites you to watch the two interviews he did with Jerry Falwell Sr. on our Web site at or leave your comments on our forum.