

Liberty University 43rd Commencement Keynote Address

"Where Do You Exist Dynamic Faith?"

by Rashad Jennings

05/14/2016

Thanks & Honors

Thank you President Falwell and First Lady Becki, Trustees, Faculty and Staff, distinguished guests, family and friends. It is truly a God-given honor to be here today as your 43rd Commencement keynote speaker.

I am doubly proud because, unlike many of the previous commencement speakers, I can say that I have come full-circle, but I can actually say that I have lived on the circle too! So by show of hands, how many of you have lived on the circle? And how many of have been reprimanded on the circle? Notice that my hand is still raised... DON'T JUDGE ME!

As many of you know, just seven years ago, I sat right where you sit when I got to throw my cap in the air, say farewell to Sparky, and go on to pursue a career in the NFL.

So most importantly, above and beyond all others, I thank our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for allowing me this humbling opportunity to stand before my Alma Mater today!

Recently I had the opportunity to speak at the White House. While there, I gained a new appreciation for how important the job is to govern the greatest nation on the face of the earth. I also have to say that I don't think I could possess enough "political correctness" to ever be a "politician."

For example, the more delicious the food is, the bigger bites I might take of it, I'm just saying...

Also, I don't know about Trump or Rubio, but I do have really large, strong hands—I'm just saying... So my handshake might not feel so "Presidential".

In fact, since being invited to the White House, somebody asked me would I rather speak at Liberty or run for president. My answer was simple—Liberty is my home, and as you see, obviously I'm here today! And, the only running I'm planning on doing is for that Lombardi Trophy this year!

I must admit that it's hard to take politics serious when so many SUPERFICIAL things are being focused on. Which is why I feel WHEN IT COMES TO POLITICAL ISSUES, there is one thing that literally "TRUMPS" everything, and helps us put life in its proper perspective... And it is the fact that the Bible tells us that we overcome the world—by OUR FAITH! And since we are all a part of this great university built by God, I have an idea, how about we start this thing off by burning all that POLITICAL nonsense in the FLAMES!!

Didn't see that coming did you? Just know that I am liable to use those torches a few more times throughout this speech just to keep y'all on your toes!

I would like to remind you that you are entering into a different world than I did after receiving my degree. The moral landscape of the world is quickly declining. Throughout life you will be tested to walk with biblical truth, you will be tested to have patience with Christ-like tolerance, and you will be tested with temptation to hold your spiritual fortitude and your convictions with the remembrance that it is BY AND FOR a Holy God that you stand or fall. And He is able to make you stand!

I tell you today... My life has been NOTHING short of an incredible journey so far. And without a DOUBT! I know the best is yet to come! But not just for me... The best days for each and every single one of you graduates are also ahead of YOU! But to experience those "BEST" days, you have to realize and remind yourself of the vital importance of walking by faith. For if you try to navigate this life by mere human sight, you will miss the many ways that God is seeking to lavish grace upon you!

Yet, keep in mind that faith does not come without cost... In fact, the first three letters of the word faith are the exact same first three letters of another word you will not be able to avoid. That word is failure. I would be totally insincere if I did not remind you that somewhere along the line, no doubt, you will fail!

But know... failure is sometimes the cost of faith. Because TRUE faith is often very risky. A Sovereign God may even CAUSE you to fail in some sort of way. But I can assure you that it will not be for the sake of failure alone. Then what is he doing, you may ask yourself? He is preparing you for the next leg of your journey. He is teaching you, if you are willing to be taught. He is carving a CUSTOM path that can ONLY be followed by faith.

So don't allow yourself to lose heart, because failure can be one of two things for you— It can either be the end of something good, or the beginning of something even better! Faith makes failure the beginning of something better when you remember that faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen! Know that God is always pleased to have more in store for those who choose to trust in Him. I'm a living witness of that fact!

Christian author, Robert C. Shannon writes...

It has been said that only man comprehends what he cannot see and believes what he cannot comprehend. Much of what we comprehend we cannot see: atoms, germs, love, hate, loyalty, sacrifice. He who lives by sight lives poorly indeed. Faith is learning to live by insight rather than by sight.

Let's reiterate one part! ***"Faith is learning to live by insight rather than by sight!"*** And there is no better source of insight into all of life, than the word of God!

This great university was conceived in the mind of FOUNDER, Dr. Jerry Falwell. It was built on the foundation of God's word alone. Jerry was a man of truly dynamic faith! Every one of us today are the fruit of his great faith in God; yes, even all of you who are visiting for the first time!

How so? Well let's look at it... You would not be here in this place, on this occasion, if Liberty had never become a reality. You would've had to settle and send your child to the *SECOND best school* you could find... Truly one man's phenomenal faith in God, trusting in his conviction of the word, literally moved a mountain and brought everyone here today! I trust that you understand what that can mean for *YOUR* faith!

A Fond And Faith-Filled Memory

Speaking of Dr. Falwell, I can remember like it was yesterday. It was the very day I decided to transfer to Liberty from Pittsburgh University. As I walked on campus and had the opportunity to sit in his office—and *for those of you who didn't know Dr. Falwell, he had a presence about him that made you want to be quiet and listen*—As I talked with him, I'll never forget what he told me, and I quote: *"Rashad, you will help change this university in a major way. You will be the reason why one day we play and beat Notre Dame and become a*

nationally known university. Thank you for coming back home. Thank you for choosing Liberty!"

That statement he made to me was filled with such dynamic faith that I instantly believed it and was moved to do all that I could to make it come to pass! When I came to Liberty, it wasn't what it is today. We had no Big South Championship rings. In fact we were 1 and 10. But that group of guys we put together made a declaration that we would do all that we humanly could to fulfill Dr. Falwell's vision! And it is that same spirit that continues to flow throughout the campus and across the fields of Liberty University today!

In the words of that most inspirational movie, "Facing the Giants," we are faithfully preparing our fields and continually praying for rain! And look at us today Liberty!!! To the great Fighting Irish of Notre Dame... Know that we will continue to have the utmost respect for you, even after we beat you... And to Dr. Falwell, who smiles down on us... I can tell you sir, that it won't-be-long-now!!! Because THE "FLAMES" ... ARE... GETTING... HOTTER!!!

A Special Guest Invited To The Stage

Today, since we are all in some way a part of Jerry Falwell's "Big Hairy Audacious Goal" I find it perfectly fitting to mention the last book Dr. Falwell wrote before his passing. It is entitled "Building Dynamic Faith". I'm sure that many of you had it as a textbook in one of your classes. If you never read it, get it! It is truly worth every penny!

Well, that 31-day devotional and chronicle of the faith that it took to build this great university has more to say than what is written in its pages. So without further adieu, I'd like to bring a special guest to the stage. His initials are "DF". No, no, it's not Dr. Falwell—well, not completely! But his name is "Dynamic Faith." Please join me in a round of applause for our special guest "Dynamic Faith" everyone!

And as he makes his way to the stage, I'll step aside. But I would like everyone to join me on the count of three, to ask him this question—"Where do you exist Dynamic Faith?" We all can do this, right? Let's give it a shot... Nice and loud, on the count of three... Here we go... One, two, three... "Where do you exist, Dynamic Faith?"

Let's see. Well, for starters... I exist across the globe. I exist in the hearts of people. I desire to make them know. In Him there is no equal.

I exist in people with prosperity, who have it all, and would trade it all, just to keep their integrity.

I'm sometimes down in the dumps, with those who've failed miserably. Yet I'm there to share, when THEY declare, that THIS is not-the-end-of-me.

I'm at my best, when it's confessed that it cannot be done... Weight, race, religion, friend or spouse division, I survive and overcome.

I exist in the pain of an athlete's injury, I inspire their refrain... "What does this down-time make possible for me?" What do I stand to gain.

I look in millions of children's eyes, and see my first inception. Yet in a world of so many lies, they only can see deception. I exist to make them see, God's-truth has been revealed. But I need to do this through people just like you... those in the stands, and you who are on this field.

In short, I exist in all sorts of ways and in all sorts of people such as Rashad, and each and every one of you! I exist to bring forth the heavenly Father's business of letting people know that we overcome the world by walking in faith!

But I have found one major problem during my travels... You see, with all that I have done, most of which I have not even begun to mention today, I have hardly even utilized one ounce of my awesome power! Yet I am so anxious to unleash it!

So now that you know where I exist, I have a few questions for you graduates today (guests feel free to join in). And all I ask you to do is shout back to me a "Yes" or a "No" answer as I ask these questions. Will you participate? (Excuse, Will you participate?) Here goes...

Will you make it a goal to take me-and-keep me with you for the duration of your life's journey?

Will you invest me in the Lord with all of your heart rather than leaning on your own understanding—and instead acknowledge HIM in all your ways?

Will you invite me in the conversation when you are asking God for something—AND will you keep ME in mind once He gives it to you?

Will you take me along when you are seeking—AND will you keep me when you find it?

Will you hold me as you knock on doors—AND will you bring in with when they open?

And finally, will you always endeavor to remind yourself that even a mustard seed of me is enough to uproot trees and move mountains like Jerry did?

In a nutshell... Will YOU have DYNAMIC FAITH? Very well then, I am happy to exist in you!

You see, I'm not asking you to be perfect, but I am asking you to believe in He who is! Trust me, it is your only hope of living the most fulfilling life you can! And let's be realistic folks! Who doesn't want to live that kind of life?

Well, I'm about to turn this thing back over to Rashad now. Thank you Rashad and everyone else in attendance for having me... Today, but most importantly, *FOREVER!* Rashad, the mic is yours! Don't hold us too much longer, because WE can't wait to get out there into that world!

Wow, Dynamic Faith, I must say it was a pleasure and an honor to hear from you! And.. I guess I don't have much longer. Give "Dynamic Faith" another round of applause everybody!!

Why I Chose To Speak On Faith

Now... Most would agree that college commencement speeches aren't exactly the most exciting things to sit through. But I trust WHAT Dynamic Faith and I were able to present gives substance to your hope and evidence of things yet unseen. Nevertheless commencement speeches aren't extremely important. But this one is! And since so many other speakers before me have focused on things like politics, business, and industry, I figured I'd be just a little bit different and talk about the one thing that all of those other topics stand or fall by—simple, childlike, Christ-centered FAITH! After all, playing politics is doing nothing but trying to win a favorable opinions or sway votes our way! But why would we worry about politicking when we already have favor of the ONE opinion that really matters!]

Liberty University's mission is clear—To develop Christ-centered men and women with the values, knowledge, and skills essential to impact the world. It is **undeniable** that Liberty is continually Training Champions for Christ! My favorite part of our mission statement is where it say, *"We are changing lives one degree at a time."*

We all know that a degree is defined as a title conferred on students by a college, university, or professional school on completion of a program of study. But I am compelled to focus on another definition of the word degree. Webster's also defines degree as **"the amount, the level, or the extent to which something happens or is present."**

The piece of paper that you have earned today will play as a KEY to unlock doors. But the DEGREE to which you apply hard work and faith will determine how far you go in life and how much of an impact you make in the world around you. You must work hard to make life happen, and when you work, you must be completely present if you want to have the most success! So... take your degree with you, and MAKE IT COUNT for the Kingdom!

What you are doing today is infinitely bigger than a certificate or diploma! And there is nothing more important you can begin to do like never before with what you earned, than to pray! On Day 9 of Building Dynamic Faith, Dr. Falwell discusses executing your life plan. Here's what he writes: "I've discovered that if I plan my life on my knees, everything falls into place." Then he quoted St. Augustine who said, *"On your knees, pray as though it all depends on God; leave your knees and work as though it all depends on you."* How very true I have found that to be in my personal life and my professional career! I hope that you will forever KNOW and experience that value too!

7 Simple Thoughts...

So, in parting, I feel it is my duty to try to add value to your life, but to also leave with you something to mark this memorable occasion. Because to be quite honest with you, I don't exactly remember much of what my commencement speaker said. And after talking with friends and family, they can't even remember WHO their commencement speaker was!

I came into this thing DETERMINED that if you don't remember anything I said, though I believe that you will pick up a few nuggets, you definitely wont FOOORGET ME "yaaaaa boy" came with all this fire!! Hey, don't judge... We are the flames! Ain't no shame in our game!!

Finally, I will share with you "7 Simple Thoughts You'll One Day Be Glad You Remembered". I've had my graphics guy design a frameable printout that you can place in

your home. As time goes on, you will come to understand how valuable they are to you. You can get a copy of it by going to RashadJennings.com and clicking on the link "7 Things".

They are simple—even to the point of being childlike. Yet, you still might not understand all of them right now. But I can promise you that they will be worth remembering. So here goes...

1. The exceeding abundant power that worketh in you rarely works unless you work too.
2. Itches that you create are usually the ones you don't want to be scratchin'. You can always make integrity your Tinactin.
3. Peter didn't sink beneath the waves by worrying about tomorrow. He was fearful about his next step—the next moment.
4. When trouble comes, remember: If God is not with you now, then He never was; which means that your problem is worse than you originally thought. But if He IS with you, then its even better than you think!
5. Forgiveness is not "for you first..." It is for God because He said that you have to.
6. Expressing love is more of a decision than a feeling. But when it is real, it will be felt in ways you can't fully explain.
7. Laugh at the right things a lot, sing joyful songs a whole lot, and develop your own happy dance and always look for reasons to use it!

We are called to be the salt of the earth. We are sent by Christ to bring the FLAAAAVOR (lil dance- swag) of God's righteousness to the world by living a particular way and sharing the gospel of Christ that makes sinners thirsty, for the water of LIFE, that only JESUS can give.

And you know what else is significant about salt? It does not burn in fire! In fact, Jesus even mentioned salt and fire in the same context when he said, "Everyone will be salted with fire, and every sacrifice will be salted with salt." Just know, in that context, he was even speaking of hell's torment for those who refuse to believe. Therefore they will be preserved in pain forever!

But unlike them, we are those who have been salted by GOD to WITHSTAND the day of His fiery wrath! And if we will not burn under God's wrath, then how much more are we to withstand the burning temptations of this fallen world!? "WE" ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH!

So remember, there is no need to over-complicate this thing called life. It is complicated enough. The power of simplicity is one of the most precious resources in life! Jesus led the simplest of lives, and yet he continues to impact the world like no other person who has ever walked the earth.

Was it simply because He is God? No, because He even told us that we would do greater works than Him. God delights in taking ordinary people and doing extraordinary things through them... will you be one of those people? Here's one thing I know for sure... When GOD has your back, you can DREAM CRAZY BIG!!! You have no limits!!!

It has been my utmost pleasure spending these precious few moments with you! Congratulations, class of 2016. Now go set the world on fire. SHAD OUT!