



HEROES



OF THE



CHRISTIAN



FAITH



R.C. SPROUL



Heroes of the Christian Faith

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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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Introduction

I'm convinced that all of us pattern and shape our lives after models that we observe, often from our youth onward. The Bible not only calls us to imitate Christ and to be in conformity to Him, but frequently calls attention to the patterns of life evidenced by some of the great saints of Scripture. For example, Hebrews 11 gives us the famous roll call of the saints, from Abraham to Moses to David and so on. We are called to emulate the virtues displayed in the lives of these great people. We need heroes and heroines—and not only when we're children. Even as adults, we need to be inspired, we need to be encouraged, and we need to see examples of people who go beyond the ordinary to the level of the extraordinary.

One of my heroes of the faith was Francis Schaeffer. I can hardly contain the sense of admiration I felt toward him, particularly in the latter years of his life when he steadfastly continued in rigorous ministry despite having serious, debilitating illness. His courage spoke to me personally and continues to speak to me. We need to see people like that.

When I was a child, I had many heroes, figures who stood out as giants of heroic character. The Hardy Boys were probably my first heroes. Then my parents got me a series of books featuring Chip Hilton. Chip Hilton was an incredible athlete. He played every sport—football, basketball, baseball. But what stands out in my memory of Chip Hilton is not merely his skill, but his steadfast character as a champion committed to fair play. He was idealistic and altruistic. I've always retained some of the ideals planted in my mind through that fictional hero, Chip Hilton.

Then I graduated to real live heroes. One of these was Doak Walker, a multisport athlete at Southern Methodist University in the 1940s. He won the Heisman Trophy as the best collegiate football player and also played on the baseball and basketball teams. He was another champion who was clean-cut and committed to standards of decency. I could list scores of other people

who influenced me during my youth. They were bigger than life. For the most part, they were public figures who had achieved a degree of fame for being sports or movie stars. Yet I was totally oblivious to the characters that God had placed before us as champions. It wasn't until I was in college that I read the Scriptures for the first time and began to look at people's lives from a totally different perspective.

As a newly converted Christian, I was hungry to become acquainted with the people of the Bible. As I read the Old Testament for the first time, I was aware that I was meeting heroes and heroines who were real live people, people whose heroic characteristics exceeded anything that I had ever dreamed of in American culture. Then in seminary, I became acquainted with the saints of church history, men such as Augustine, Athanasius, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and John Calvin, who have all had an enormous impact on me. I wish they had an even greater impact. In fact, I went through a period when I first started to teach when I was so absorbed with the lives of great Christian saints that I would often pray: "Lord, make me like one of these men. Make me a Luther. Make me a Calvin. Make me an Edwards."

Then I read also about difficulties of these saints' lives and the burdens that God placed on them, the suffering that they experienced for righteousness' sake. I remember changing my prayer: "God, please don't make me an Augustine or a Luther or a Calvin. I'd just as soon not have to carry those kinds of responsibilities through my life." Despite the negative fear that was generated in me, however, that standard was still set before me.

It's often easy in the Christian life to think that we're doing OK. We might compare ourselves to the Pharisees and think that we're pretty good. We can become easily satisfied with where we are in our own personal walk with God. It can therefore be helpful to look at some heroes of the faith so that we will be inspired, not in a superficial way, but in a lasting way, as we see people—real men and real women—who by the grace of God and by the Holy Spirit have been authentic heroes and heroines.

Moses: The Mediator

When we read the Old Testament, one figure stands out in its narrative perhaps more than any other, and that is Moses. This figure is so awesome, so heroic, so majestic in his accomplishments and in the power of his personality that he can be not only inspiring but also intimidating. Moses' role in the Old Testament is unique, at least in its proportions. His role is that of a mediator. The term *mediator* is most often applied to Christ, but it also applies to Moses.

So what is a mediator, and what does a mediator do?

A mediator is somebody who stands between two parties or groups. When we call Christ the Mediator, we are saying that He is the One who, as the God-man, stands between us and the Father. A mediator does not stand between two parties as a barrier or an obstacle; rather, his function is to intercede between the parties and to bring them together. For instance, in a dispute between workers and management and a strike has broken out, a mediator might be brought in to try to bring about reconciliation. Christ as Mediator, in His work of atonement, performs a work of reconciliation.

Moses was the mediator of the old covenant. According to the New Testament, Moses was the mediator of the law (Gal. 3:19). The law came through Moses—not *from* Moses but *through* Moses. The law is the law of God; it wasn't Moses' brainchild or invention. Moses was the mediator; God gave the law to Moses, and Moses came down from the mountain and said, "Here's the Word of the Lord." Moses spoke to the people and announced the

terms of the covenant made on the holy mountain, when God made Israel a nation after the exodus (Ex. 20).

Christ, on the other hand, is the Mediator of the new covenant (Heb. 9:15). The New Testament notes that Jesus is a much greater Mediator, since the covenant that He brings is far superior to the one brought by Moses, which might tend to make us disparage the role of Moses.

Before he rediscovered the gospel, Martin Luther was depressed, discouraged, and worn down by the law. He had no peace until he understood the announcement that our justification is through faith in Jesus Christ. When he understood that truth, he made an outrageous comment. Luther was given to strident outbursts; he was not sedate and calm and soft-spoken. He was so excited about his new understanding that justification is by faith alone that he said, "To the gallows with Moses." Luther was given to hyperbole; he meant to call attention to the fact that the gospel is vastly greater than the law. I don't think, though, that this comment actually reflected Luther's deep appreciation for the function in redemptive history that was performed by Moses.

We normally think of Moses' delivering the law at Sinai, but if you look at his life, there's a sense that he was prepared by God from childhood to be in a position to mediate. The earliest history of Moses' life is covered very quickly. We are told of the dramatic circumstances of his birth, and then the next thing we read is that he's a young man who has been educated in the court of Pharaoh and treated as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He has been given access to the finest education and privilege that Egypt could offer its sons. He is reared as royalty in the most powerful nation in the world at that time, but he gets into trouble and loses his privileged position in the royal household of Pharaoh and is forced into exile. He is banished and then sentenced to live out his days as a fugitive in the wilderness.

Moses loses all his royal privilege because he kills an Egyptian. He does this because he sees an Egyptian beating one of Moses' own people, a Hebrew slave. Moses sees the defenseless slave being beaten, and he jumps into the fray, striking and killing the Egyptian. He is then found out and has to flee for his life.

Moses wanders into the Midianite wilderness, having lost his privileged position. Coming upon water troughs where some Midianite women had come to water their flocks, he observes some roughneck shepherds come in

from the desert and tell the women to get away from the water. Moses intervenes and drives the shepherds away, allowing the women to access the water.

In these stories that we read about the beginning of Moses' life, we see Moses performing the role of a mediator, a person who stands in the middle.

Moses understands something early on: If he is going to act as a mediator, he must be prepared to take fire. Stepping between two parties that are angry with each other and trying to bring peace and reconciliation is difficult, but that's the role to which Moses is called as mediator.

We know virtually nothing of Moses' life from the time that he is a young prince until he is eighty years old. The great achievements of Moses—the exodus, the leading of the people through the wilderness, the judging of Israel, the giving of the law—come well after what we would consider to be the years of retirement. At sixty-five, Moses is still a shepherd in the Midianite wilderness, totally unknown, living in anonymity. Then God speaks to him in a bush that is burning but not consumed and calls him to the highest role of mediatorial service that has been accomplished on the face of the earth up to that point. In Moses' call, we see something else important about the man.

In Exodus 3, God calls Moses from out of the burning bush, explaining that He has seen the affliction of His people. Moses responds, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Ex. 3:11). You would think that a man of this kind of strength who has waited so many years to have an active involvement in some sort of significant task would say: "Where have You been? Why didn't You come and show up fifty years ago when I was in my prime, when I had gone through all that training in Pharaoh's court and was positioned to take on the Egyptian nation?"

Not Moses. He asks: "Who am I? Why would You call on me for this task?" There's no hint of megalomania in the personality of Moses. He actually argues with God. He tells God that he's slow of speech and that God must have made a mistake and chosen the wrong man. God has to rebuke him and inform him that He doesn't make mistakes. God tells Moses not to worry about that and to let Him take care of it, since He has already prepared Moses' brother Aaron to be Moses' spokesman. God tells Moses to simply obey.

So Moses obeys. He takes on the task that God gives him, the task of going back to the people of Israel to tell them that he is going to lead them out of bondage into freedom and that God is going to deliver them from slavery.

Moses preaches this sermon to the people of Israel and they get excited, and then what happens? Pharaoh makes the Israelites' work harder, requiring them to keep making the same quota of bricks but now without the benefit of their daily supply of straw. To make bricks, they would have to go and scavenge whatever straw they could find.

The burden on the Hebrew people is intensified as the direct result of Moses' first stage of leadership. Moses obeys, and as soon as he takes one step forward to lead, he incurs the wrath of the whole multitude. Moses responds: "O Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people, and you have not delivered your people at all" (Ex. 5:22–23).

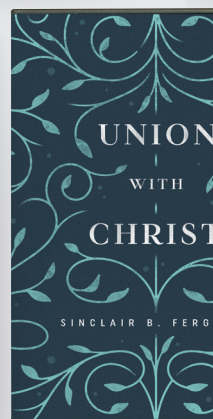
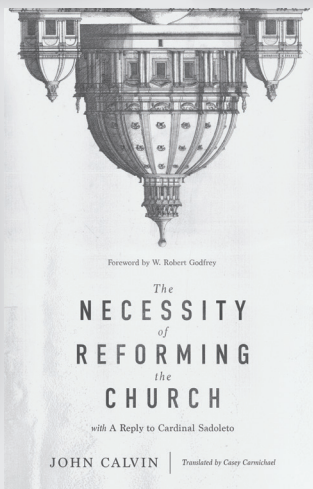
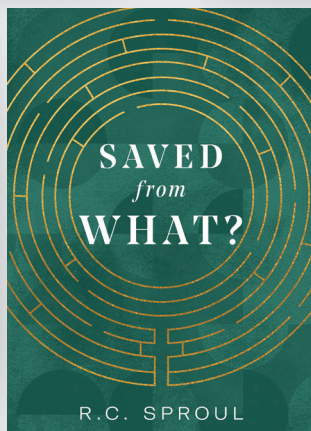
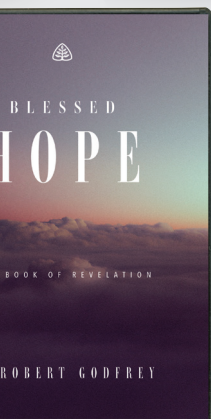
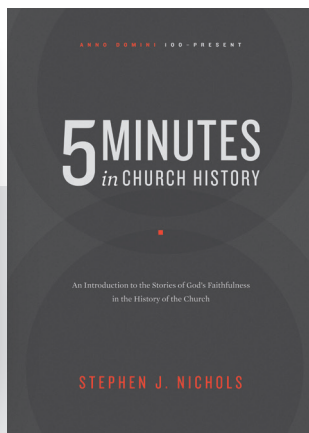
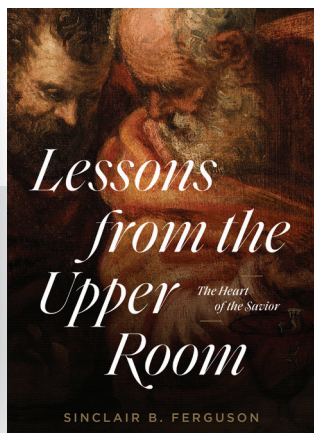
Many ministers experience the same thing in their pastorates. They seek to be bold, they seek to be courageous, they seek to be faithful, but the only results they can see are destruction, pain, and anger. They turn around and cry out to God: "You sent me to do this? Is this what You had in mind?" Then the fire goes out because one of the hardest things for any Christian is to wait for God to accomplish His promises. It's comforting that Moses struggles with this same thing because, at this point in his life, the deliverance of the Israelites is not an accomplished historical reality. It is still what seems to Moses an unreachable dream.

It doesn't immediately get better for Moses. In fact, it gets worse, despite miracle after miracle—the Nile turned to blood, the hailstones that kill the cattle and the crops, the plague of frogs, the plague of gnats, and so on—when it seems that victory is certain. Pharaoh says, "Go ahead and go; I've had enough." Yet as soon as Moses is ready to lead the people out, Pharaoh's heart is hardened, and he changes his mind. Finally, after the death of the firstborn Egyptian children, Pharaoh relinquishes his grip and allows the Israelites to go.

Moses leads six hundred thousand men, women, and children out of Egypt until they come to the Red Sea. But again, Pharaoh's heart is hardened. From behind the Israelites come Pharaoh's armies with their chariots, and in front of God's people is the sea. They are totally trapped. Yet all this time, Moses has been following the shekinah cloud of God.

Then the cloud moves from being in front of the people of Israel to coming around behind them, and it stands between Pharaoh and the children of Israel. Now who's the mediator? God Himself stands between His people and

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