

# ***SPIRITUAL PRACTICES FOR THRIVING LIFE***

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## **ACTION SEQUENCE**

What evidence have you seen that God protects you from the forces of evil?

What activities produce the deepest sense of joy and satisfaction in your heart?

How would you live differently if you exclusively gave your attention to life giving acts of creativity?

**Isaiah 43:16-17** – <sup>16</sup>Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, <sup>17</sup>who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched, like a wick.

### **I) Chase Scene...**

Epics are not simplistic happily-ever-after tales. They are complex and rich, three-dimensional stories that reveal something about our lived experiences. Salvation is not escape from a life knowing good and evil. It is the assurance we will survive and have been granted the power to thrive within the world as it is. Evil remains and will confront us. Jesus' epic captures this. Made in His image, faithfully telling His story through our lives takes following His lead in all the scenes. Even the action sequences. Perhaps the most challenging work, that which separates the amateur actors from the scene stealers, is whether we remain devoted to the character of Christ while being chased by those who would destroy us. Do we faithfully produce the climactic chase scene or rewrite it into a fight in which we pretend to be the hero?

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◆ **Breakout:** Epics need the tension of impossible situations. When missing, the audience does not believe the story. The power of stories is their relatability. Only when everything else relates to reality is the heroic moment a thrilling possibility. “Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea... (Isaiah 43:16)” We know this story. God’s people, defenseless against their pursuer, trapped against the Red Sea. He opens a way for their breakout. If the beloved were the hero, they would rise and conquer their pursuer against all odds. But no, the beloved is granted a miraculous opening through the sea. Our source of hope in conflict is God.

◆ **We’re being followed:** The recklessness of the wicked is displayed in an endless pursuit of their prey. Rarely are villains satisfied unless their power is universal. None can escape their clutch or else they are proven limited. Our acceptance of Jesus’ invitation to follow Him out of evil is a blow to Satan’s pride. He dispatches his army to chase us down. We look back and realize we’re being followed. But we misperceive the situation. The Lord makes “a path in the might waters (v16).” That which appears to us as our escape is the marshalling of our Hero’s force of salvation.

## II) No Way Out...

Epics require the tension of impossibility. Impossibility cannot exist alongside ultimate heroism. Our perception that there is no way out of a situation is due to our inexperience with heroism, doubts about the fullness of heroic force, belief in the supremacy of the visible. When we perceive this way, we are principally the audience observing the story. We are His beloved, but do not yet sense ourselves as such. Only once we inhabit salvation do we lay down the role of audience and tell His story in our lives.

◆ **Too fast:** Breaking out of captivity, we want to leave unseen without pursuit. If we are pursued, we want a getaway vehicle faster than our pursuers. Unfortunately, that is not our reality. In a literal sense, we cannot outrun our problems. Satan pursues us with “chariot and horse (v17),” while we are on foot lugging the baggage of slavery. The path through the waters was a good idea while the column of fire—our Hero’s defense—blocked our pursuer’s way. It moved. We appear doomed by the speed of our enemy who is certain to overtake us. Certain without an impossible act. But if our Hero intended to defend us, why did He move out of the way?

◆ **Too mighty:** Speed does not create enough tension. The epic requires our pursuers to be fast and fierce. When caught, we are

destined to defeat. We will be enslaved at best, destroyed more likely. We are chased by “chariot and horse, army and warrior (v17).” God did not rescue the Israelites at the height of their power in Egypt. He waited until their prominence and respect were forgotten, they were weak, untrained in the art of war and without weapons. Their pursuers are too mighty to overcome. The use of an ancient story to inform our modern one is intentional. Satan tempts us to misperceive ourselves as different than Israel, armed and ready for war. We would rather make a stand than take God’s path out. We are fooled by our conviction things are as they seem.

## III) Impossible Rescue...

God is both Hero and Author. He writes the script. As we improvise to fit a narrative in which we are the hero, He writes in greater and greater opposing forces. Eventually, victory is impossible. So too, it seems, is rescue. When the Canaanites and Philistines were not scary enough, He introduced Babylon. How do we reconcile this with an all-loving God? Let’s look hard for the good we receive from the presence of an opposing force.

◆ **Over before it began:** Looking hard at the story, we identify an aspect overlooked at the time. The might of the waters was not in opposition to our escape. It was set in ambush of our pursuers. The battle was over before it began so long as God’s beloved obeyed and used the path out. It is God “who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior (v17).” He brought them out so that He could subdue them, making them “lie down, they cannot rise (v17).” Salvation is the Lord’s. He is our Hero. We are faithful to the script when we live the story as God’s beloved whom He saves. One good we receive in the presence of opposition is His continual act of redemption. Believing we are saved we now see the fight was over before it began.

◆ **Divine protection:** The villains of our story operate unwillingly under the authority of our Hero. God permits them to threaten as a perpetual reminder of His continual salvation. If they attempt to overstep His boundary, “they are extinguished, quenched like a wick (v17).” He wants us to believe this, experience it, live like it is true all the time. Faith. Faith creates hope that we can exclusively attend to our purpose as agents of His creative, sustaining, and saving work. Salvation is not avoiding evil but ignoring it. Ignoring it because our Hero has proclaimed His divine protection from it. He has created the space in which we are free—from inhibition, anxiety, fear, harm—to immerse ourselves in His good works.