

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

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## **SET THE SCENE**

What are some of the heroic acts God has performed in your life?

How do you tell the story of His heroism through your way of life?

What sidekicks most tempt you to believe in their heroism?

What can you do to maintain a healthy relationship with these sidekicks without them becoming heroes in your story?

**Isaiah 43:12** – I declared and saved and proclaimed, when there was no strange god among you; and you are my witnesses, says the Lord.

### **I) Characters...**

Stories work through the arc of characters relating to the world around them, encountering a threat to the relationship, and a resolution into a new relationship. As storytellers, we need to know the characters, their relationship, and the threat to the relationship. There are three explicit character groups in God's story told through our lives. There is an implied character group, too. These character groups are a permanent part of God's story, existing since creation until the end of time. The clearer we understand these, can identify individuals within the groups, and respond accordingly, the better storytellers we will be. Remember, we are made as storytellers for the purpose of telling God's story through our own. Careful study is part of perfecting our craft.

**JULY 7<sup>TH</sup>, 2024**

◆**The Hero:** There is a distinction between the hero and the main character of a story. We are made to tell our own story. This is where many get the story wrong. We merge the main character with the hero. We are not the hero of our story. God is. He tells us of His heroic actions, “I declared and saved and proclaimed (Isaiah 43:12).” The tension of the story is the temptation to merge main character and hero, recasting God into the role of sidekick.

◆**The Hero’s beloved:** Every hero has a beloved, those for whom the heroic acts are performed. God’s heroism manifests as He fulfills the needs His people cannot independently satisfy. We are those He saved, to whom He also declared and proclaimed. We are those to whom He says, “you are my witnesses (v12).” We are the beneficiary of God’s heroism for the purpose of telling His heroic tale.

◆**The sidekicks:** Epics often have roles for sidekicks. Sidekicks are instrumental to the Hero but are neither independently heroic nor essential. In other words, the Hero will achieve His purpose with or without a sidekick. When sidekicks are mistaken for the Hero, they become a “strange god among you (v12).” Examples of modern sidekicks are people, money, and technology. One emerging sidekick of which we must be wary is AI.

◆**The audience:** We cannot ignore the implied character of the audience. Our lives as stories involve those observing because our story affects them. As the Hero’s beloved, we are “witnesses (v12).” Witnessing is irrelevant without someone to whom to testify. All creation is our audience, but specifically we are instructed to tell God’s story to the people in our lives. Believers who benefit from affirmation, and foreigners seeking the Truth.

## II) Relationships...

The tension within many stories is the conflict arising from dynamic relationships between the characters. One character can threaten the community by altering their position. Resist and order is preserved even if the divergent one departs. Order dissolves into chaos as others allow the reforming of relations. Let’s examine the original relationships.

◆**Direct divine engagement:** God as the Hero is directly engaged in the lives of His beloved. He “declared and saved and proclaimed (v12).” These are direct actions of an immediate relationship. He invites sidekicks, such as Moses and David, as partners, not intermediaries. We, His beloved, do not have any opportunity to doubt who is the Hero.

◆**Powerful and attractive:** As His “witnesses (v12),” we attribute every heroic act to Him. The first heroic act is our existence. It is the beginning of our story, ordering all that follows. Considered this way, our daily lives are the result of His heroic act. Our lives, those of God’s beloved, are powerful and attractive to our audience because we tell an extraordinary tale. We tell stories of prophetic wisdom, abundant character, hope in miracles, and eternal security.

◆**Heroic radiance:** The relationship between the Hero’s beloved and sidekicks is crucial. The sidekicks deserve the glory of being chosen to radiate the Hero’s light. They are never deserving of independent glory as if they are the Hero. Without the Hero, they have no power to declare, proclaim, and save. They go from divinely anointed to “strange gods (v12).”

## III) Turning Point...

God confesses that He is jealous. Our relationship is threatened by the temptation to elevate a sidekick to hero, reassigning God to sidekick. This temptation is pervasive because sidekicks appear like gods in that they exercise the authority and power of the Hero while the relationships are intact. When we give in to the temptation, however, God removes His heroic power and the illusion fades. A world of sidekicks and no Hero is doomed.

◆**Condition of exclusivity:** Our Hero declares what He will do to reveal His knowledge and power. He knows what will happen because He will do it. He saves to show none are more powerful and faithful than He is. He proclaims to each character because He is the author of all stories. When His beloved stray and sidekicks assume His role, He pauses the heroic, saying “I declared and saved and proclaimed, *when* there was no strange god among you (v12).” He promises to be a constant heroic Presence when we witness for only Him.

◆**The consequence of infidelity:** Some sidekicks are so attractive and powerful that we are sure they are heroes. I’m special and others know it, another human can affirm my worthiness, money can provide my wants, AI can do anything for me. Our specialness fades while our bodies decay and the character of God within retreats. Money’s boundaries become clear without God orchestrating His provision. AI may have infinite knowledge, but without God’s wisdom, knowledge is the fast track to destruction. God proves that besides Him “there is no savior (v11),” when His heroism is absent while we play in the presence of “strange gods (v12).” Avoid the heartbreak of infidelity. Set the scene properly and be a fanatic of our Hero, the Lord.