



# THE FOUR PATHS

Quadratos is a new name for the ancient, universal, four-path journey of growth and transformation.

Recognized by every major religious faith and school of psychology, the four-path Journey is sequential, cyclical and never-ending. It forms a map of our ongoing human experience across life's four great questions:

**How do we face change?**

**How do we move through suffering?**

**How do we receive joy?**

**How do we mature in service?**

At its most universal, Quadratos is experienced in the pattern of the four seasons, and nature's cycle of life-death-life.

This four-path Journey was at the very heart of early Christian belief and practice. It was woven into the fabric of every practice and was the Spirit-led thread to the choice of the four traditional Christian gospels and their sequencing, stitching them together into a seamless, unified story of radical transformation.



## 1st Path

### HOW DO WE FACE CHANGE?

#### Climbing the Great Mountain of Matthew

Across time and culture, people have felt a desire for permanence.

For many, mountains have connoted the eternal; representing an unchanging security.

Nonetheless, at some point, even rocks crumble. All of us come to the experience of enormous loss. Whatever we believed would stand forever, burns, trembles and falls. It is precisely at this point that we find ourselves standing on the first path, with all we thought we knew shaken to the core.

In this experience, the millennia disappear, and we are on “common ground” with those to whom the Gospel of Matthew was written, in first-century Antioch in the days following the destruction of the Great Temple in Jerusalem and the massacre of the Jewish priesthood.

For the first Christians (Messianic Jews), their beliefs and way of life were utterly destroyed. Faced with the need to re-define and re-imagine what it meant to be a Jew, they were looking to Jesus the Christ for answers.

In Matthew's gospel, the central landscape is that of an inner mountain. Much like the people of the first century who climbed up a mountain to hear Jesus teach, the first path invites us to climb toward a larger understanding of God and ourselves. Yet, this journey begins in grief, as we must first let go of yesterday's truths.

The first path—like the season of autumn—is bittersweet with gratitude for this year's harvest and a recognition of our need to make room for what comes next.

Like climbing a mountain trail on which you cannot see what lies ahead, letting go and moving onward can take all the courage we have. In this moment, as those earliest Christians did, we may also turn to The Gospel of Matthew as a wise guide, answering the question, "How do we face change?"



## Second Path

### HOW DO WE MOVE THROUGH SUFFERING?

#### Crossing Mark's Stormy Sea

On the first path, we chose to exert, climb and awaken to our need to face change.

Now, on the second path, we encounter the chaos and emptiness of being in-between. The old is gone but the new has not yet come. This path is without a doubt the most agonizing one of the journey.

We find ourselves in the darkest dark—the dead of winter—where it is hard to perceive any growth. Unable to see the life at work deep within the seeds beneath the ground, we wonder if something has gone horribly wrong.

Like the disciples in the boat with Jesus facing a vicious storm on the Sea of Galilee, we feel terrified, exhausted, fragile. The winds and water lash us as we are tossed about in a gray, horizonless world.

Is help coming?

The bleak condition in which we find ourselves is the same condition in which the early Christians of Rome in the middle of the first century found themselves – lost, alone, struggling to believe in a better life.

Falsely accused for setting the great city on fire, the Messianic Jews (Christ Followers) and their families were being rounded up and horribly executed on the order of the Emperor Nero.

In the Gospel of Mark, these early Christians were given a meditation and prayer to hold their hearts steady in the midst of such soul-searing trials. So may we.

As the disciples' feared for their lives swirling in a deadly storm at sea, Jesus' response is one of comfort—"I am here, do not be afraid. The journey is not over." This response was an anchor for the early Christians in Rome and remains so for us in our own painful second-path experiences.

Mark aids us in knowing that even in the stormy sea, even in the dead of winter, the Christ is here—always present. This eternal now is Mark's balm in our anguish as we wrestle with the deep question of the second path, "How do we move through suffering?"



## Third Path

### HOW DO WE RECEIVE JOY?

#### Being in John's Glorious Garden

On the second path, we remained constant, enduring all the difficulties and struggles in quiet hope. Now, in one electric, life-changing instant, everything shifts and a blinding fresh reality enters.

Like the arrival of spring, all of a sudden we see new life everywhere, around us and within us, popping up from all the places that had for so long seemed barren and dead.

The third path arrives by surprise, opening in us like the everlasting embrace of an eternal guardian or an intimate lover. We are filled with an unexpected experience of union—full, unencumbered, and totally indescribable, as though we have walked through a gate into the most beautiful garden imaginable.

The sensations of this moment will be different for each of us. Some of us will be aware of a new energy; we may tingle, tremble or burst in exuberance. Others will feel a deep stillness, or the arising of a great calm.

Almost universally, we will perceive everything as gift. Awake to an abiding presence and a sense of communion with all, now we know that joy is a reality that arrives from beyond ourselves. We have our answer to the question of the third path, “How do we receive joy?”

But what is the meaning and purpose of joy? And how can it be sustained?

These were the questions of the late first century Christian community in the teeming city of Ephesus to whom John writes. Using the image of the paradisaical garden of oneness at the beginning of time, John’s gospel shows how this community might recapture that bountiful garden where all flourish. This gospel became their blueprint, providing practices that helped former tribal enemies create new relationships based on a shared belief in diverse oneness.

The third path, with its text of John’s gospel, shows us how to receive joy—and how to use its energy to form harmonious relationships amidst wide diversity.

These practices of oneness were radical then and continue to be radical today.



## Fourth Path

### HOW DO WE MATURE IN SERVICE?

#### Walking Luke's Road of Riches

On the third path, we glimpsed a bright new reality. On the fourth path, we begin the work of bringing this reality to everyday life.

Like spring buds that mature into summer fruit, on this path we learn how to bring forth change in our own lives and offer its aroma to those around us.

Unfortunately, the fourth path is largely overlooked and rarely taught. In the bliss of the third path, we assume we have arrived at the end of the journey. When we inevitably encounter the day-to-day realities of life, we long to go back – and we might wonder if the reality we glimpsed and energy we felt was just an illusion.

While the journey thus far has brought us greater understanding, we must now take up the work of making actual changes in our attitudes



and behaviors. Like the early Christians to whom the gospel of Luke was written, we find ourselves asking “what now?”

Shunned by their mother tradition of Judaism and condemned to execution by the Roman Emperor, the emerging Christian communities of the late first century endured bitter rejection from every side. In the face of such overwhelming oppression and hate, how could they persevere in their vision of forming a more just and loving human community?

In Luke’s gospel, the great teachings and miracles of Jesus occur walking along the road, reminding us that the new world we seek is created as we walk, step by gradual step. Jesus the Christ shows us how to speak truth to power while walking in love in the everyday ordinary moments.

Luke teaches us that changing the world around us begins by embodying change in our everyday life. Answering the question of “How do we mature in service?”, Luke offers us a picture of persistent, patient, small actions—a steady work of love, touching one heart, one heart, one heart. Like water flowing over a rock, this love transforms even the most immovable of obstacles. Love wins!

Returning to the ancient gospel reading sequence of Matthew, Mark, John, then Luke, we can once again see how each gospel tells of one of the four paths. Each text offers guidance on one of the four questions. And each reveals a different, vivid landscape through which we experience the lessons and wise counsel of each path.