

THE WORK OF THE PEOPLE

The Four-Gospel Journey

Revealing the Path of Transformation & Deepening Love

Introduction

“Whatever our challenges today—personal, communal, spiritual, or even planetary—we can think of ourselves as being at an immense crossroads. This is a moment that offers enormous possibilities for transformation and at the same time looming obstacles and inherent dangers. At such a juncture, we need clear vision, fresh thinking and wise hearts to help us not only navigate our lives, but do so with a sense of equanimity and love. We need treasured guides that have stood the test of centuries, and are also astute enough in the present moment to truly provide worthy counsel for today’s crises and tomorrow’s unexpected dilemmas.

“As Christians, I believe we need our sacred texts to live in a way that helps us to unite our hearts *and* minds—to combine devotion and practice with critical thought and loving-kindness. There are those who believe that in order to achieve such union, we need a more “historical” gospel, more closely based on Jesus’ original words. Others ask for a new gospel entirely—one founded on continued revelation in contemporary writing and poetry, possibly including music and other elements. However, I believe that the answer we seek can already be found in the four traditional gospel texts of Matthew, Mark, John and Luke—an answer that requires no change at all, but only a fresh way of understanding.” —Alexander John Shaia, *Heart and Mind: Second Edition*, pg. 5

Welcome to the journey of transformation. At least, welcome to a new awareness of the journey you have always been on: the transformation of your heart.

Over a decade ago I found myself in what I described back then as a “dark time” when my dad introduced me to a movie called *Finding Joe*. It was a movie about the work and theory of Joseph Campbell called the hero’s journey. I don’t think I will ever forget how my heart felt throughout the film, more than a series of “ah-ha’s” and “I knew it’s,” it was as if my mind was suddenly able to see that I was standing before an unfolding map that my heart had been carrying my whole life.

THIS is what that was!

THAT is what THAT was about!

I remember that dark night of the soul—and the mourning...but OH, the MORNING!

The RISING and UNFOLDING of the new...

THIS is how I learned to WALK WITH,
to HOLD SPACE,
to MAKE ROOM.

The human cycle of journeying and returning.

The journey, as Shaia explains, teaches me “how to live now.” It not only teaches me how to come undone, but that I will overcome being undone as God holds my parts open and together for examination in order to see areas where I had become enslaved to my thoughts and circumstances. This clarity offers me movement out of slavery into freedom and gifts me to community.

I say this to you not to ramble aimlessly (although we have made an art form out of rambling at *The Work of the People*), or to prove I know something or am someone of importance, but to tell you at the onset of this journey that I am going to be hanging right here with you, just as a fellow traveller on her path as well. That may not seem so important while you are tying your shoes, checking your gear, tucking a map that you perceive to be the way into your backpack, and grabbing your walking stick, but it may be a comfort for not if, but when you have two feet full of blisters, are having to ration food, have gotten turned around in the pitch of night, and are in what feels like a desperate need for a cool, clear, drinkable water. In turn, it also might be a delight to know I am celebrating with you when you find a wellspring, or notice upon the rise of sun a tuft of ripened berries and are able to kick off your shoes and have a nice rest in the shade. I am coming along with, and will be reflecting alongside each film.

You may be a lone traveler for this journey, or coming along in a small circle or as a leader of a group. Feel free to use the inspiration of the questions within this guide and adapt them in whatever way you need (to personally reflect in your own way (journal, artistic expression), or if you are in a group to use them as group discussion questions or also take them as home/personal work to do and come back to share what is comfortable for them.

These films were made for the inspired work of Alexander John Shaia and follow the sequence in his book *Heart and Mind: The Four-Gospel Journey for Radical Transformation*, *Second edition*.

Also included in this curriculum are questions to go deeper into your inner work and his suggested spiritual practices for you to consider as you begin to create space for the radical transformation of your heart. Throughout the films series, Shaia will be teaching some history about the origination of each of the gospels and giving us insight to the wisdom each gospel speaks, answering the core question of each path.

During the phases of deconstruction and rebuilding, remember this journey is never void of the presence of Love and Grace, even when it may seem so. Offer yourself agility of mind, and openness of heart. See if you can receive yourself and your life as the gift that it is. See if you can be willing to allow and embrace each of the four paths. I will be working through my willingness as well.

“You get saved by walking the journey. The journey of transformation is an imminent incarnation experience of Christ right now.” —Alexander John Shaia

So, are you ready to journey?

Breathe.
The Christ is with you.

Let's go.

—Kelly Hall
kellyhall930@gmail.com

This series includes six sessions:

Session One // Preparing Heart and Mind for the Journey

Session Two // Waking and Facing Change: Climbing Matthew's Great Mountain

Session Three // Moving Through Trials: Crossing Mark's Stormy Sea

Session Four // Receiving Gifts: Resting in John's Glorious Garden

Session Five // Maturing Through Service: Walking Luke's Road of Riches

Session Six // The Essential Practices of the Journey

Series on TWOTP here:

<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/bundle/the-four-gospel-journey>

Alexander John Shaia, PhD., is a thoughtful and poetic man, living the ancient rhythms of his Lebanese and Aramaic heritage. He is a spiritual director, educator, psychologist, liturgist and passionate professional speaker traveling internationally, lecturing and leading retreats and seminars on The Four-Gospel Journey, Quadratos, Rites of Passage, and Christian meditation and spirituality. When not on the road, home is a fishing village on the coast of Spain and the beloved mountains surrounding Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA.

Purchase *Heart and Mind: Second Edition* and the six *Heart and Mind Community Guides*, as well as learn more about Alexander's work, Vlogs, upcoming books, Easter Retreat (Gateway to Oneness) and Camino pilgrimages here: www.quadratos.com

SESSION ONE // Preparing Heart & Mind for the Journey

Watch the Film *Preparing Heart & Mind for the Journey*

<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/preparing-heart-and-mind-for-the-journey>

Going Deeper

Perhaps after watching the introductory film and at the onset of the journey, you could consider a personal examen from “the map” of the Jewish Passover celebration as given by Shaia:

Examen your life with God and your community:

First Question

Today, where are you locked in slavery? Where are you locked in emotional paralysis? Where are you locked in fear, anxiety, despair? Are you willing to hear God’s voice of liberation in that place for yourself?

Second Question

Where today are you in a desert unto death? What today in you needs to die? What in you is standing in the way of God and Spirit?

Third Question

Where today are you hearing God’s new promise in your life? Where are you rejoicing in God’s new message?

Fourth Question

What action of God are you committing yourself to for the life of your family, for your community between now and the end of this film series?

As Shaia suggests, throughout this series one of these questions may rise as the most prevalent for you. Lean into the question, continue to get more honest as you can.

How do you experience The Christ now?

Are you willing to experience The Christ anew?

Using your answers to the questions above, what four words stand out to you about where you are at in life?

Reflection

“In the beginning was The Christ, and The Christ was with God, and The Christ is God...

In the beginning was the breath, and the breath was with God, and the breath is God.” —Alexander John Shaia

Many of us experience confusion as we are growing in our faith because we haven't a way to see if we are getting where we are supposed to be going. We feel like we should arrive somewhere, but we don't know where.

Well, we can know that we are constantly arriving at ends and beginnings (you're welcome) in the cycle of life as we know it. We travel through time via hours, days, months, seasons, years. Similarly, our inner life travels through times of harvest, dormancy, seeding, and fruition. You are somewhere on that path already. Each of us are.

We also know that Jesus leads us to and through, and that as Shaia says, “God is always ahead of us asking us to expand, pulling us into greater understanding” and we are going to learn a new way of interacting with the gospels that “helps you understand where you are on the journey” of spiritual maturation.

For nearly thirty years I have learned through teachers such as Eckhart Tolle, Don Miguel Ruiz, Richard Rohr, James Finley, Joseph Rael, Joseph Campbell, Thomas Keating, Thomas Merton, the Desert Mothers and Fathers as well as other mystics, and now Alexander John Shaia (as well as many other hands-on mentors in my life who have become dear friends, and not to leave out the 12 Steps of AA), and traveled out of the comfort of my patterned life/thoughts to broaden my experience and challenge any beliefs I held to be universally true that were only personally true. To ask why and how and where what I had come to know originated and if it still served well.

I did not mean to catalog my library just now, but just to suggest that having solid wisdom voices in your inner dialogue is good company for the journey...in fact, these are the types of mentors/teachers that arrive precisely when you are on the journey.

Here we are at the beginning. Everything seems quite normal still. That is because you are on the path that you have always been on. You haven't ever left it since conception. This is your story of a human life with Christ. Here at the beginning, before things get really real, really fast, I want to warn you that things may get really real, really fast...if you are willing.

Willingness is key.

Willingness to be rigorously honest with yourself.

Willingness to have your truths examined.

Willingness to have your motivations revealed.

Willingness to deconstruct and let God rebuild structures of belief.

Willingness to keep going, even if you are unraveling a bit.

Willingness to receive the gift of your life and carry the message to the world as Love in action.

Practice

You may want to gather a few things for the journey. Things that help you recognize a start and stop time for this work. A candle, a journal and a pen, drinking water. You may also want to commit to a day/time during the week to enter in.

For this week, willingness is your practice. Each day, find a way to communicate your willingness.

SESSION TWO // Waking and Facing Change: Climbing Matthew's Great Mountain

Watch the Film *Climbing Matthew's Great Mountain*

<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/climbing-matthews-great-mountain>

“Whenever life turns to great darkness, this is not the end, but the beginning.” —
Alexander John Shaia

Going Deeper

Hearing the summons to the journey isn't necessarily easy to decipher. Not like ringing bells or the blast of a trumpet or a thunderous voice from the sky. Sometimes it looks like the rock bottom of addiction, or perhaps a nervous breakdown or depression setting in. A phone call from the doctor's office. Losing your spouse or friends or job. A lot of times it seems to come at you out of nowhere. The world as you know it is crumbling and you are left standing there covered in ash. Reflect on your life. Take the time to really remember and feel a time you were at the onset of change. Maybe your life had become unmanageable, or maybe you just couldn't remain the same one more day. When you feel you are connected to the emotion of that time, to your best ability, describe how the invitation to change arrived, and how that felt.

Where are you? What happened? Who was there? Was there an apocalyptic voice? What did it voice say? Was there a moral voice? What did it voice say? What, if anything, were your coping mechanisms? In other words, what did you try to use to distract your self from the pain?

Did you have a point of surrender? What was it?

Where and when (if at all) did you sense God?

Using your reflection, come up with four words that describe how you face change.

Reflection

“The great overarching message of Matthew is to set out on the journey with courage and trust.” —Shaia, *Heart and Mind: Second Edition*, p 125

*One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice—
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.
“Mend my life!”
each voice cried.
But you didn’t stop.
You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations—
though their melancholy
was terrible.
It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.
But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice,
which you slowly recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do—
determined to save
the only life you could save.
— Mary Oliver*

When the invitation to change arrives in my life, I am gifted with the image of a migratory bird tucked into a tree noticing the color of the leaves are slightly off, that the sunlight is less of a burden, and the first cool drafts of air are stirring. As the wind fluffs its feathers, a bit of anxiety is stirred, change is coming, and the impulse to fly is strong.

I am not sure what thoughts or feelings a bird feels, but that is what I imagine it would feel like if I were that bird. Only, I would probably launch off the branch with the strongest wing force I had while still clawing tight to the branch because unlike birds, I often work against myself. Even if I want to fly, my issue with change is usually letting go. We all have “those things” that are harder to let go of.

I am sitting here thinking about all the ways I, a person who lives in a constant creative flux, still crave and thrive with stability and security. If I can't create the structure I need, I bring in a person close to me who can or can help guide me through creating it. I like a stable standing ground with the level of chaos I work with on a daily basis.

In his book, Shaia explains the First Path of Quadratos as having four phases:

1. “In the beginning”...there is our life as we know it.
2. Feelings of growing discomfort lead us to a great dilemma, and the pain leads us to become willing.
3. When our discomfort grows into a despair, our willingness grows into surrender, and the admission that we need help. With Divine grace, we now have hope, however small.
4. Challenges arrive to test our resolve to change and we try and fail, sometimes over and over. We betray ourselves. The Divine grace leads us to self-compassion, and with self-awareness we attempt to change one step at a time, gracing ourselves when we mess up.
5. We learn to restore our course when we fail.

As I listen to Shaia explain the destruction of The Temple, I keep hearing the words of Coldplay's “Fix You” coaxing me even in this very moment to be brave, to embrace of the first path and Jesus' reaching out for me to “place my heart and hand” in God's, take courage and enter in.

*When you try your best but you don't succeed
When you get what you want but not what you need
When you feel so tired but you can't sleep
Stuck in reverse*

*When the tears come streaming down your face
'Cause you lose something you can't replace
When you love someone but it goes to waste
Could it be worse?¹*

What could be worse than change and transformation, is no change and no transformation. At least, as painful as the stretching and expanding that evolutionary growth entails, that's true for me. So while flapping my wings with all my might—and several touch downs back onto the branch I started from for a breather and another go at surrender—please just hear me agreeing that it is easier said than done.

Surrendering my way and my plan and the structure of my entire being (temple), even if it comes to a pile of ash. I have not walked Camino in Spain, but I have walked the Avenue of the Dead in Teotihuacan, Mexico. It was on that road that I gave over all my life's experiences to date over to God with gratitude for my life. All the good. All the challenging. All the failures. All the successes. I felt as if I was able to mark some chapters as completed, ask for new pages, and fresh ink. Later in the trip we were led to a deep well, one that seemed bottomless. I leaned over toward the well, and my face met with the musty aroma of deep earth. I was suspended between here and there staring down into a long, descending tunnel of lightness to grayness to blackness wondering how far light goes and how far I would have to go.

In there.
That is where I am going.
Into the womb again for reformation.
Reformation is good.

Right?

It's the tiniest speck of light floating into the great unknown that encourages me to move forward with faith that I will be reborn, and even as drift "into" I know that entering in IS the way through, it is holy albeit terrifying, and I move into willingness to give over everything.

I surrender.

¹ Songwriters: Christopher Anthony John Martin / Guy Rupert Berryman / Jonathan Mark Buckland / William Champion
Fix You lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Group

Some Indigenous Americans associate the holy darkness directionally with the west, the dreamtime, home of the bear. Jung archetypes this as the magician, the strange attractor. Manifesting from the darkness, dream time into the physical realms. This path has also become part of the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics anonymous and helped guide countless numbers of addicts through to recovery. Step One says, “We admitted we were powerless over our [circumstances]” which leads to Step Two, “We came to believe a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity,” and Step Three, “Turning our wills and lives over to the care of God.”

Shaia says that the Gospel of Matthew teaches us that “God made the holy darkness,” and “Whenever life turns to great darkness, this is not the end, but the beginning.”

You are becoming willing.
That is what is yours to do at the onset of the first path.
Become willing to let go of what is for what is to come.

Observe yourself and don't hold on to any of it.

It is hard work, the hardest work, actually. Small deaths that seem manageable at first, but as we strengthen our resolve to continue shedding our “stuff,” the value of what we are giving up increases proportionally. These are things that are meant to die in a time such as this so that you might live for a time such as this.

Collapse into, expand through. The darkness is not bad and it is not necessarily void. It is a teacher, a parent. It is every possibility. It was out of the darkness that all things made were made. Including Light. Including all the choices that had to happen to make you who you are and all of the choices from now onward that are part of your continued becoming.

May you answer the call of the Spirit to do your part in the work of the transformation of your heart.

*But high up above or down below
When you are too in love to let it show
Oh but if you never try you'll never know
Just what you're worth*

*Lights will guide you home
And ignite your bones*

And I will try to fix you²

Practice

Shaia suggests a practice in this explanation of the First Path to help us learn to take courage in the face of darkness. As much as possible for the next week, go out and watch the sunset. Start 20 minutes before sundown, and stay 20 minutes after. Let this be a reminder that this is the beginning of a new day. Take the poem offered at the beginning of this session with you, read it to yourself or out loud as a Lectio Divina practice, then sit, observe, take in. Journal about your experiences, write it all down.

² Songwriters: Christopher Anthony John Martin / Guy Rupert Berryman / Jonathan Mark Buckland / William Champion
Fix You lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Group

SESSION THREE // Moving Through Trials: Crossing Mark's Stormy Sea

Watch the Film *Crossing Mark's Stormy Sea*

<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/crossing-marks-stormy-sea>

Going Deeper

We have begun facing the fears we need to face to become willing to face our fears. Some people refer to this as shadow work. Acknowledging our character defects so they no longer rule us. It is through this early work that (even though it is hard) we gain courage to continue onward because through it we continue to gain the reward of knowing more of who we truly are and who we are truly meant to be. This is how we receive the gift of our life, and come to understand how it is a gift to the world. This next path shows up now with even more challenges, because now that we have found a way to be willing, our greatest fears show up with a knock on the door wanting to make sure we really believe in where we are headed. So, our deepest fear comes to us as both danger and opportunity asking “Are you willing to die for your life?”

Going back to your previous reflection, and the invitation to change you wrote about in the previous session's work, what was the deepest fear you hoped you wouldn't have to face? Write about it.

When the “knock at the door” happened for you, what did that uncertainty coupled with inevitability feel like? How were you able to have the strength and will to turn the knob and welcome this challenge across the threshold?

In the face of tremendous anxieties, depression and despair, what was your answer to this moment? How did you greet your suffering? Could you go deeper into the difficulty of the moment? What gave you hope?

Can you invite the “appropriate difficulties and sufferings” toward you for the transformation of your heart?

What four words from any of your answers about the stand out to you about how you face your fears?

Reflection

“When the knock at the door comes, what is your answer? If you only know resurrection as a report from someone else, there is no reason for you to go and die. If you know the resurrection as a living reality, you know what you must answer at the door.” —Alexander John Shaia

We are sailing tumultuous seas now. The good news? Christ is in the boat. The challenging news, is that somethings are most likely going to fall overboard into the Sea of Galilee to certain death, and we will risk our lives to scramble to secure those things out of fear of letting those things die.

I have been experiencing panic attacks this past week. A strange surge of trauma and terror suddenly descends on me, my bones shake, and all my body aches. When this happens, I feel very alone. I become afraid of the unknown, afraid of what is going to happen to me, and I feel like I am going to for sure die. I lie down, my eyes close, and let my tears carry out the trauma and fears I am afraid to speak. Words of prayer, utterances to God that I know something in me is about to die, and I am laying down in it at my best ability to allow the process.

I am terrified to die and yet dying is the way through.

In my younger years, at the onset of awakening, mentors arrived on the scene to care for me. Each time I met my new mentor, I came at them full force for answers to deep questions about the way through. They inevitably told me a story about their life (one that may or may not have made sense to me at the time) and pointed me back towards myself while offering me some sort of blessing for the journey. They kept pointing me toward an entry to the path that was always virgin, mysterious, and uncertain. And they kept pointing me towards God’s absolute love and self-acceptance.

As I have been given the gift of time, and have had the gift of being placed on other people’s paths, I understand. We don’t have one another’s answers, just our own growing theology with God that we can offer. As Travis Reed says, “All I can give is what has been given to me.” We must keep one another going through, and give our gift for their passing. We must bless their death and look forward to the rising of their new life.

While in Teotihuacan, Mexico, I experienced God as the Origin matter that keeps agreement with all creation. God birthed out of its expansive, holy unknown, the

Light of life that continues to move and evolve and illuminate and expand to this very day. This is true within our bodies just as much as it is true of the cosmos. We learned to face our shadows, and how to turn from negative egotistical ways of managing the chaos of our lives through our character defects, and instead draw upon the agility of the holy unknown to co-create with God our way through...we learned to lean into the resurrection of Christ to cross deadly seas.

Practice

This Buddhist prayer from the film is simply beautiful. Spend time with this prayer this week, making notes along the way either mentally or through creative expression what emerges in you.

Grant that I may be given the appropriate difficulties and sufferings on this journey so that my heart may be awakened, and my practice of compassion and liberation for all beings may be fulfilled.

SESSION FOUR // Receiving Gifts: Resting in John's Glorious Garden

Watch the Film *Resting in John's Glorious Garden*

<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/resting-in-johns-glorious-garden>

Going Deeper

Going back to your personal reflection in the past two sessions, talk about how it felt to get to the other side of your fears and challenges. Try to remember as much detail as possible about what it felt like in your mind, heart, and body. What was the gift you received from the work? Write it all down or consider another form of artistic expression to tell this part of your journey.

The lowest lows and the highest highs are what have been our teachers along the path, all of which brought us to where we stand with a greater openness and acceptance. The third path comes with the question: "How do we receive joy?" How do you practice opening up to joy? How do you receive it and rest in it?

Shaia describes the Third Path as the experience of joy and union, and goes on to say that what unifies us is greater than what separates us. Each of us "are already made of the incorruptible substance of God," and he goes on to explain Christianity as "the first tradition on record to be pan-tribal." This changes the table-dynamic drastically. Where are you at with welcoming those who seem obviously "other" to your table? Who are the most challenging people for you to pull up a chair for? What keeps you from making room for them at the table of your heart?

What else in this film made an impact on you?

Considering all of your answers for this session, what four words stand out to you about how you receive joy or experience unity?

Reflection

"What arrives and opens in us feels like the everlasting embrace of an eternal guardian or an intimate lover. We are filled with an immediate and unexpected

experience of union—full, un-reflected, visionary, totally indescribable.” —
Alexander John Shaia

I went on a weekend getaway with my closest friends. We're an adventuresome bunch, the kinds of women wise enough to follow the promptings of whispers about thin places, about holy grounds. This is the second time we've propelled our swirling selves into the unknown...a fine and good habit, we believe. One of the days during our time, we climbed into the car with loose intentions and headed towards a mountain town well known for its thin places. We ended up stopping just 1/2 way there to feel out a place that sounded promising.

The grey-stone chapel backed up to a beautiful lake, which we walked towards through a beautiful archway. There were large-bellied geese enjoying the warm North Carolina day on the shore. As we made our way around the Chapel, we found the treasure we were looking for. The labyrinth.

It was simple, much simpler than a few of us had visualized—just a worn path on the sunny chapel side yard. The four of us stared at it for a minute. It can be a strange sensation to leave not knowing what you would find and yet find something deep down you were looking for—curious and miraculous are words that come close...but aren't quite enough.

We took off our shoes, I came to the threshold of the Labyrinth first, and took a deep breath. I had left Houston with troubles on my mind and a weighted, breaking heart. I stepped onto the path. Slowly, each of my friends entered in. The ground was hard and dry, warmed with sun, and scattered with Goose shit.

Yes, that's right. There was shit *everywhere*.
You had to be mindful to avoid it.

We walked though, breathing, watching where we stepped, slowly pacing out our path towards the center. One by one we arrived to the inner core, some of us with tears, others with giant grins. We took a moment there, breathing, expressing, celebrating within. With great clarity I heard a voice say to me, *Welcome to the heart of God*. I closed my eyes and took several breaths to appreciate and accept this welcome. I looked into the faces of each of my beautiful friends.

We had made our way to the heart of God. We weren't on a pathway paved of gold but a pathway so narrow you had to walk one foot in front of the other to stay

on, and that was literally littered every 6 inches or so with poo. Some things started to become clear to me:

There was shit on the pathway into God's heart, what's more, we likely tracked some in on our heels...and yet God did not seem phased by it. We were welcomed regardless of what we carried in with us.

We didn't have to come changed.

We didn't have to come with proof we lived good, sacrificial lives.

We didn't have to claim to believe or know God what-so-ever.

We were welcomed for who we are, period. Regardless. Never-the-less.

This was oddly reassuring. Then I realized something else: stepping out of the heart of God put me right back on a shit-filled road! There was no avoiding it. The road in, the road out...it was as if we were getting a simplified and yet amplified lesson of Life 101: there will be shit.

It
Will
Be
Messy
And
Yet...

I heard clearly, "You leave soaked of the heart of God." I was dripping with God. We were dripping of God. Every step left an imprint. We didn't do anything differently. Stepping slowly, watching our feet, winding, like blood cells carrying oxygen through a trail of artery. But, our perceptions were different. I didn't feel the weight of what I entered with.

Welcome, Beloved, to the heart of God.

Have a seat. Lean in. You have been hard at work, rest. You belong. Let your eyes adjust for a moment to the lighting here, the colors (I know) are rich. Enjoy this experience. Breathe. Take it all in. Do not rush.

After walking through so many questions and fears, and coming to face our personal scarcity in a wilderness time of our lives, we are called into a time flowing with milk and honey. We have crossed the threshold of the promised land. The gift

of remembering we are God's beloved. Removing blocks of fear that cut us off from the flow of life has made way for a wellspring of new life. We will rise to walk again, but first we get to remain captive to this blissful moment of oneness with God and all things.

In all of our trials.

In all of our successes.

In all of our nothingness.

And all of our muchness.

God has gifted us with a bit more of the answers to some longstanding questions with glimpses of what is always possible with God.

In his book, Shaia describes the euphoria that comes with the mystical experience of oneness in the Third Path - an experience of oneness which includes taking in with fresh sight all that the journey entailed with gratitude and a sense that it all belongs. In *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, Thomas Merton described his experience of unity this way:

“In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all these people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world....

This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud.... I have the immense joy of being man, a member of a race in which God Himself became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now that I realize what we all are. And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.

Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in God's eyes. If only they could all see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed....But this cannot be seen, only believed and 'understood' by a peculiar gift.”

Christ's full acceptance of us gives us permission to accept ourselves and receive the gift of our life (and all that comes with it) which ultimately leads to a deep resounding joy which in turn also hopefully leads us to being able to accept one another with Christ-like welcome.

We are given the gift of our life, along with compassion for what we've done or not done, and what has been done to us. And, having been called out of sleep onto a path of awakening and detoxifying ourself from our fears, we are brought to a place of rest, abundant God, and much needed joy. God meets us and shows us what we couldn't see before...and that is what has always been available to us, always been true about us, and always been within us. So, bliss out with God here. Tune yourself to this frequency. Take it all in, this is good medicine for the journey that is not quite over.

Practice

Have you walked a labyrinth? You may know of one in your area, or can use a simple google search to find one. If you don't have one in your area, you can create a simple one by marking the four directions: North, South, East, and West, and finding the center. I have found this to be a beautiful way to orient myself to fully acknowledge where I am on the planet. You can walk to each of the directions telling God about your journey, and then make your way to the center. By walking this path you have basically constructed a Celtic cross. At the center, you can acknowledge your humanity and divinity, and God's place above and within all things. Take the time at the center of the labyrinth to receive what God has for you. There is no rush, rest in this place taking in through all of your senses.

SESSION Five // Maturing Through Service: Walking Luke's Road of Riches

Watch the Film *Walking Luke's Road of Riches*

<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/walking-lukes-road-of-riches>

Going Deeper

Going back to your personal reflection throughout this study, and learning what your gift is to the world, think upon how you walk that forward in your every day life. Where has your gift led you? Who do you walk alongside? How do you share your gift?

Does sharing your gift still bring you joy? What else brings you joy?

How have you learned to serve from the heart center? Where your service is not centered around your identity or ego needs, but something that you do because you can't not do it?

What, in your experience, are the true riches of life?

Reviewing all of your answers for session five, what four words stand out to you about your gift and what you are made to do?

Reflection

“We will so appeal to your heart and to your conscience by our ability to love in the face of what others see as great suffering, that when we win our freedom, the victory will be twofold, for we will win yours as well.” —Martin Luther King adapted by Alexander John Shaia

As I watched Part One of this film, I could not help but reflect on the 12th step of AA. Here's my adapted version for the Four Path of the journey: Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of the journey of finding God within, we carried our gift of God's love and acceptance to others, and continued the work of practicing our new understanding in all our affairs. We may feel like new beings, but we are reentering the same old world. A world that thrives on people falling asleep, numbing out, and dumbing down. That is why people keep attending meetings: to stay awake.

Years ago, when the founders of AA were having success with the 12-steps, and began to regain their lives, something interesting happened. The wives of the men who were recovering started coming undone because now that their husbands were restored to sanity, there was no one to enable, blame, control, or manipulate. So, as the addicts got better and better, they started to recognize their *own insanity*. *Ironically, it was the same 12-steps that helped them heal from their co-dependency issues.*

I only say that to let you know that when you have had a transformational experience, it not only will effect you, but the people around you. The important thing to remember is to stay with your healing and keep offering your gift. The world needs your bit of light, your story, your perspective, your compassion, your love, and your hands and feet. Some may be really happy for you, some may want to learn from you, but there may still be some who want you to be the old you. So, temper yourself as you come online in your usual circles. I like to remind people of a few things they may already know but are easy to forget:

You don't have to share EVERYTHING as its happening or just after it happens. Your transformation is restructuring your whole inner world, it takes time. Just let it continue to work inside of you. Let it fully integrate into your entire being and way of being. If you have one solid, trustworthy friend, mentor, spiritual director to share with, that can be helpful.

You will bring this gift to the world by living it out first and foremost. Your healing is already healing. It's already bringing more love and acceptance and God into the world. You are the gift. You are enough.

Your path of transformation is not everyone's path. Be someone along the way who simply says "Yes" and "Keep going" to others on their path.

Some people you serve will "get better." Some will not. Have healthy boundaries, and try to meet people with curiosity before judgment. Love them through your gifting, regardless of whether they ever get things "right."

When the world becomes too much to bear, when pain and questions come, breathe. Pray. Wait. Play. Play takes us to the joys of life, and reminds us of the agility we have to co-create with God. Laugh. Taste. Listen to nature. Take in Love.

Place spiritual practices in your daily, weekly, and seasonal life to sustain you for the long haul.

Give God all matters, all things, all ways. Do your next right thing to do, trust God with the rest.

Always be prepared to be at the beginning again. Be a student of your life.

We are growing up. We are gaining our freedom. We are learning to be courageous to follow the journey. We are learning to be courageous to live with God. We are learning love others as we have been loved, to pass on what we have learned with hope that it inspires others to be free.

“Are we concerned that our lives will be too short for the task? That we will never see results? No, never. We now know with certainty that life is eternal, and God’s time is the only one worth marking. We have our greater purpose and it is very clear. We are focused on the noble work with which Christians were charged 2,000 years ago and which hasn’t changed:

Follow the journey—
Understand and know God.
Follow the journey—
Grow and live with God.
Follow the journey—
Pass it on and serve God

And do this with all our heart and soul and strength and mind.” —Alexander John Shaia

Practice

As you continue to let your gift unfold within you, and as your heart’s desire moves from within you out into the world, remember to spend time in silence. Practice deep listening for what is yours to do. As a blessing, I offer this poem as a companion or beginning or end to your silent sit:

If you make room for me,
I will come in.
Stretch yourself, breathe.
Grace yourself, breathe.
Reach out, beloved,
unfold your arms,

let me move between them.

I will make my home,
You will be my living room!
I'll call in more of myself
and continue to alter this space
so that you can bear this world
and even more—embrace it with me.

Its through your arms
that I will cradle nurslings and the dying,
Pound drums with the thriving,
support the barely surviving...
Yes, with open arms
we will receive joy and mourning;
we'll clean up, stall out, and fight on
we'll lift and let down,
be vulnerable and strong—
with these two very human arms!
These lanky, expressive tools of the trade
will embrace again and again...
So, I bless your hands to act as my own,
to connect as me, to love through me.

You feel inadequate at times,
you have a direct view of your insufficiency,
your wounds, your hidden mess...
Don't take your eyes off of me!
I AM still breathing, thinking, creating...
pondering new ways to
impart love and grace to you...
through you,
through us!

It's you and me.

So, share us,
touch them, pass me on.
Love who I love
and give what I give

because I tell you truly,
the more of the lost you come to know,
the more found you become.
The part of you that is me
will have found the part of me that is them.

And, O how I love them,
and, O how I love you!

Trust, me my love,
your arms, though small,
can bear this world—
I AM the strength
within them.

SESSION SIX // The Essential Practices of the Journey, Parts One & Two

Watch the Film *The Essential Practices for the Journey*

<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/essential-practices-for-the-journey>

Going Deeper

Shaia describes freedom as “Christ’s non-judgmental love that makes us want to grow.” He goes on to say, “Love calls to Love,” and that the practice of freedom includes acceptance of yourself exactly how you are. How do you define freedom? Do you have a practice of freedom?

Shaia says that “True freedom requires safe boundaries.” It requires us to act with honor and respect for ourselves and others. What boundaries have you established that serve you and others well? What are areas of respect and honor for yourself and others are in your awareness that need work?

Making room for the other is a lofty concept, but not an easy practice. The other doesn’t come into community with ease, ever. They come in with challenge and opportunity. They are messengers who bring us our internal transformational work assignments. They remind us our perspective is one of many, and that there is another line of sight to consider. They teach us unconditional love. How do you welcome the other in your life? How do you serve the other with your life?

Shaia says, “We need to remember, that as we go to the world in service, that we live in a cosmos that is already the Christ. And so, therefore we do not fight people. We bring awareness to new ideas, to new concepts, to new experiences.” We must continue to speak truth in union in love.” To do that, we remember not to create stories about others that in any way make others superior or inferior to everyone else. We don’t demonize, we humanize. Do you notice a tendency in you to inflate or deflate others? How can you work to bring this habit into your awareness so you can remind yourself of our equality?

We have become accustomed to our houses, our grocery stores, and other modern conveniences. We have forgotten the rhythm of life as seen through the changing of the seasons. Shaia poetically welcomes us to “absorb the deeper rhythms” of the cycles of life as seen through the changing of the seasons or the cycle of one day.

How are you drawn to the outward expressions of living, dying, and rising as a comfort to your inner rhythm of the journey?

What four words do you have to express where you are at the end of this series?

Reflection

When my children were babies other parents often talked about the schedules they kept. Feeding schedules, nap schedules, bed time schedules, and routines. I was an ultimate fail at all of these things. I totally went by my kid's natural schedules, I followed their innate knowing of when to eat and sleep.

I think they are going to be okay people.

What I didn't get then that I get now, is that we need to have a rhythmic way of living. I don't know if that includes adhering to regimented daily schedules, although I see people thrive in that! But I do think it includes placing practices in our lives that rest us, dismantle beliefs that don't serve us, build us, restore us to God, and allow us to grow.

Do you have any practices in place?

Shaia has offered us four places to start, but I think the key is just to start. It can be daunting if you feel like you don't know what you are doing, but let me reassure you—you will. It's a practice, and I think the goal is to find a handful of mindful ways that befriend and enrich your journey. For me, each Sunday I leave out of the house with coffee and walk down our property toward the woods and the small creek that runs behind our house. There is a retaining pond there that I like to sit at and have no thoughts whatsoever (when possible).

There are times when the pond is almost completely empty with families of deer leaping through, and others where it is overflowing its steep walls, connected to the creek, and swimming with life. I just sit and watch, mesmerized like when I was a young child. I let go of all the things of my head, all the responsibilities, and the world of "my way."

This works for me. It's simply complete.

If you are looking for inspiration for contemplative practices, he lists more practices in his book *Heart and Mind: the Four-Gospel Journey for Radical Transformation, Second Edition* and he also has other resources to continue the work that can be found through his website here: www.quadratos.com

If you are looking for another TWOTP series that complements this study, consider viewing Becoming: A Season of Rebirthing and the film A Death to Awaken based on the Dark Night of the Soul.

It has been a blessing to share with you throughout this series. I hope you have come to understand where you currently are along The Four-Gospel Journey, and I bless you to be right where you are at because that is where you are blessed to be.

May you come to know yourself as the one God has always loved.

Video Transcripts

SESSION ONE: Preparing Heart and Mind for the Journey

Alexander: When I was an undergraduate at the University of Notre Dame, there was this quirky, passionate, energetic professor who came every year to teach upperclassmen in theology about scripture. And his name was Joseph Campbell. But of course, this is long before Joseph Campbell became known to the general American public. And what he was teaching us was, is that every great story on the planet is told in four parts that there's a structure that, and the way that you tell a story that seems to match something that's in the inner human experience of life. At that moment, which was 1973, I immediately began to wonder if there was a connection between this four part story of the human journey and that the Christian Church ended up with four texts that we call the gospel.

Alexander: So that journey for me of searching and discovery went from 1973 until the year 2000 and I kept trying to find a way that these four texts tell a larger story. Oftentimes I would find myself forcing it. I had enough, I hope, integrity to step back until finally in the fall of the year 2000 I was reading another book and I got the key. The key was given to me. Pure gift.

Travis: How's that?

Alexander: About how these four accounts that we call the gospels are actually one continuous story of transformation. Everything since that moment in 2000 has been about trying to help people understand that yes, they are stories of Jesus obviously, but I don't believe that they were written to tell us about Jesus alone. They were written actually to be something far more efficient and effective.

Travis: What do you mean? Where did it go from.... It was there was alive and you talk about something bigger. What was that you saw that was bigger and where, you know what I mean?

Alexander: That each one of the texts is telling us through Jesus' life, how to walk that part of the journey of transformation. So the stories are built upon the life of Jesus, but the way that they're crafted and that the way

they're given to us, they tell us about how we live in the midst of that life, so that it's not just simply about historical reality from 2000 years ago, but it's about a present moment reality about how we can follow this path and in that language-

Travis: To get to heaven.

Alexander: To live well, so that heaven is now. Early Christianity was not concerned about an afterlife. We're one of the first traditions that had the sense of an afterlife. But the focus of early Christianity as it was the focus of our mother tradition Judaism was how do you live now. And that how you live now is what you will begin to experience on the other side. It's not focused on our last breath. It's focused on every breath.

Alexander: The early Christians knew because they had assumed this from our mother tradition Judaism. Judaism's great story is told in four parts and they consider the four parts story in Judaism as the way of walking with Yahweh. So when Christianity comes along, we don't need to reinvent that story. What we need to do is we need to add the account of Jesus the Christ, life, death, and resurrection in to the four-part story. So when Irenaeus in the second century, who's the first person who tells us about the choice of a gospel and his very first words are the gospel. The one revelation must have four parts because he does not say that we're going to go out and choose correct stories of Jesus.

Travis: Can you say that again?

Alexander: Irenaeus does not lay down as the basis of the choice of the gospel correct stories of Jesus. We know that there are correct stories of Jesus which are not in the Bible. There are other accounts of Jesus which are not in the Bible. What was the basis upon the choice of these four and what Irenaeus begins to say to us is the gospel account must be four. It can't be one, it can't be three, it can't be five, it must be four. What was he understanding about the number four and then in his treatise called Against Heresies written in 180. He goes into all these beautiful metaphors about the four points of the compass and the four rivers that come out of the garden of Eden. And the four winds, et cetera, et cetera. People have tended to not give him much credence

because he's talking in metaphor and we know we're looking for the true story of Jesus.

Alexander: But what Irenaeus is telling us is the choice of the gospel text was the choice of the text about how we transform. In his metaphor, transformation has four parts to it. Back to Joseph Campbell who gave me that first thought, all great human stories are told in four parts.

Alexander: In Campbell's metaphor, the first part is hearing the summons to the journey. In Christian metaphor, we can call that *Metta bene Noya* the desire to grow. The second part is having the desire to grow. We then go through a wild and wooly time, a desert time where we have to unlearn. The second part of the journey of transformation is unlearning. It's embracing uncertainty. It's stripping away what we have known, so we can understand it in a new way. It's not stripping away because it's not true. It's stripping away because the way that we have understood it is too small. And then the third part of the journey, Campbell talks about it as receiving the gift or his language was receiving the boon.

Travis: The what?

Alexander: The boon, the gift. In Christianity, I would say it, it's receiving the charism, the talent, the personal calling, knowing what that is. But then comes the fourth part, which Campbell calls returning to community with larger ability to serve because receiving the gift is nothing but having the infant in your arms. Now you have to grow that infant up. You have to take what was a nascent small early understanding of the gift and develop it into something that serves the world and serves your community and serves your own deeper spirit.

Travis: That sounds like works. I thought you're not supposed to grow. You just accept Christ and then you're there. That seems, yeah, cancel that.

Alexander: Yeah, and that's exactly... Christianity has been exactly at the point of the third path and not understanding that the third path is not the final path, that there's a fourth path that comes out of the third path, which is the moment that you receive or understand love and Christ is a tremendous moment where your awareness explodes. But unless you take that awareness to practice and to internal work and external work, it's still born. In terms of the journey, it's sort of like the old

monopoly. It's back to go and start over again because the third path must mature into the fourth path.

Alexander: I mean, here we are in this beautiful forest. But use the image of the growing cycle of a fruit tree or the orchard or any food that's going any... What's the word I'm looking for? Anything on a farm, anything in the pasture land which is going to mature to feed us. The moment that it blossoms, which is like the third path. It's beautiful, it's gorgeous. That blossom has awe in us, but it doesn't feed us yet. That blossom has to mature into a fruit and the fruit has to mature past the green, raw bitterness to some sweetness and then we pick it and then it feeds us and it nourishes us.

Alexander: The same is true on the spiritual journey with Jesus the Christ. That moment of new realization or first realization, wow, don't want to go without it, but it's just the first moment. It actually is the beginning moment of a whole new journey. It's not the end moment.

Travis: But you can always just go to Home Depot and buy a plant and go to the grocery store and buy food, so you don't even need to go on the journey really. If you need a bigger plant, just dig up the plant and go buy a bigger one.

Alexander: Yeah, I mean sadly we live in a culture today which is product driven rather than growth driven. We go and we buy something rather than develop it. Christianity has fallen into this very sad pattern as well. We-

Travis: Well, how Christians not... We've forgotten how to develop Christ life or whatever you'd call it.

Alexander: Yes.

Travis: What's underdeveloped?

Alexander: Because we're like newborns with the vision of the Christ that we have not made this earth heaven. The work of the fourth path is taking the vision of the Christ and saying the Christ is not over there and the Christ is not up there and Christ is not just under us or all around us, but the Christ is here for us to make part of our everyday reality.

Travis: But through metaphor, how can you find truth through metaphor? I'm trying to get to right belief. It seems a little fuzzy, a little hippie-isher.

Alexander: It's certainly true that we have so concretized the Jesus.

Travis: We've done what?

Alexander: Concretized. Made Jesus into a concrete, small, literal expression of God when Jesus is certainly a concrete expression of God, but Jesus is an expansive expression of God who is always a half inch ahead of us. Always leading us to expand our understanding more.

Travis: What are we missing out on?

Alexander: Love, growth, forgiveness, reconciliation, compassion ever going ahead of us.

Travis: What do they do?

Alexander: So one of the things that we'll explore as we get into the four paths, a lot of the difficulty that many of us have today and including Christianity and a lot of our spiritual traditions today, not just Christianity, is a difficulty that comes out of the third path. It's the reason, I see, that the Gospel of John was written because the Gospel of John was written as a way for us to always pull up another chair at the proverbial table. Always to reach beyond our current understanding. The tragic figure in the Gospel of John is Nicodemus who is the natural law guy who says, "I know everything about God. My tradition has given me everything about God from yesterday." And because of that, Nicodemus can never open his heart to understand what God is doing something new today.

Alexander: It's the precise wounding of every great tradition they get into this place where they become satisfied with what they have known about God and you come up with a new question today. The easiest thing today is to say, "Well, everything has been revealed. We've known about X since the beginning of time. God can't do anything new today." And we are right back into the Gospel of John, the figure of Nicodemus, who was there to say to us, "We always need tradition. We need to put tradition on our shoulder. We need to listen tradition. Tradition needs to slow us down, but tradition is never there to stop us and to paralyze us and to pull us back to yesterday."

Alexander: Unless you know how to deal in the spiritual practice, how to deal with the Nicodemus voice, which is a Holy voice but not the holiest of voices. You're going to go back to yesterday and say that's where God is. Christianity has always said, in its best sense, "No, God is a half inch ahead of us and because God is a half inch ahead of us. God is stretching us. God is asking us to be more. God is asking us to understand all the major moral questions today in larger understanding."

Alexander: So we must use the path of transformation to discern what spirit is asking of us today. One element of that discernment will be tradition. But if we rely on tradition, as other people have said, we are living our ancestors faith and not ours.

Travis: But you can build some stuff.

Alexander: Oh I need tradition because tradition gives me the guide ropes. That's the way that the Christianity is best to use tradition to know the guide ropes. But we also know that-

Travis: I'm sorry, what do you mean guide rope? So that you don't mess up or to help you come forward into love, you know what I mean? Because that guide roads could be a bad thing. Don't mess up or no or...

Alexander: Guide ropes are the shoulders on a road. You don't want to go off the road. You can go so far this side and you can go so far this side that the healthful creative way is this middle way between the two extremes.

Alexander: But how do we discern what are the appropriate guide ropes? What I understand is the gospels are given to us not as the answer book, but as the way to help us with spirit discern the answer in each year, in each era.

Travis: Yeah, so there's this a liveliness again where it's like, "Well, I need it to be this answer book so that it has the certainty of these answers gives it this authenticity for absolute truth." Which then I can... Why is that like that? Yeah, you need that. I need absolute truth. I get those things very honest human things want to make sure they're doing the right thing and doing that, but then that actually keeps you from growing.

Alexander: Well, it does because you need the map. The map in Judaism is the great Passover coming out of Egypt story. This is how they understood

and examined themselves in their under... Of how far on the path with Yahweh when they celebrated Passover in the time of Jesus. It's not like the way we celebrate Passover today. The way that that Jews celebrate Passover today was a creation 200 to 300 years after the time of Jesus, after the destruction of the temple. The way Passover was celebrated in Jesus's time was the family is gathered around the head of the household over a very simple meal is going to ask four questions and going to ask the family or all those gathered at table to examine their life with each other and their life with God through these four parts of the journey.

Alexander: So the evening would be something like this. The first question, the head of the household would say, "We know that our ancestors were slaves in Egypt and we know that Yahweh raised up Moses to bring us a path of liberation. We also know that every member of our family in Egypt had to make a choice about whether to go with Moses or not. Tonight at the table, where are you locked into slavery? Where are you locked in some emotional paralysis? Where are you locked in fear, anxiety, despair. Are you willing to hear God's voice of liberation in that place for yourself?" Talk, talk, talk around the table.

Alexander: Later in the evening would come the second question. We know that those of our ancestors who went with Moses across the Red Sea and into the wilderness, went into that wilderness for 40 years as a place until death. We also know that many of those who came out of Egypt died in that desert. Where tonight are you in a desert unto death and what tonight in you needs to die? What in you is standing in the way of God and spirit? Talk, talk, talk around the table.

Alexander: Later in the evening comes the third question. We know that our ancestors came across the Jordan River into the promised land. And having arrived in the Promised Land with great jubilation and great belief in God's promise to them that they would come here. They rejoiced. Where tonight are you hearing God's new promise in your life?

Alexander: Now, what is so phenomenal about this ancient festival of Passover is all of these questions are happening at once. Even though the head of the household is telling a linear story about coming out of Egypt, the questions are being asked, where right now, are you locked in fear? Where right now are you in a death experience? That may be

something that you need. Where right now, are you rejoicing in God's new message?

Alexander: And then at the end of the evening would come the fourth question and they will have taken now the cup of Elijah, the last cup of wine at the meal with a cup of Elijah is the cup of mercy and compassion. And with this cup comes the fourth question. Now at the end of Passover, what action of God are you committing yourself to for your own life, for the life of your family, for the life of your community, between now and next Passover. Talk, talk, talk around the table.

Alexander: So there we have it. We have the annual Jewish festival of transformation. Not as the historical event alone about the coming out of Egypt, but as the metaphor, the map for living today and knowing that on this Passover night we're going to ask these questions of ourselves, but probably somewhere in the year one of these four questions that's going to become the most important of the four questions for us. Maybe it is right now for many people who are locked in some great fear and paralysis who are locked in some place where we think these are the worst times and things are getting even more worse and they can't be reversed.

Alexander: I would suggest to you that that experience is true in yourself, but the truth is you're being invited to a new journey. This is not the experience of the end of the journey. It's the experience of the beginning of the journey.

Travis: That's the good news.

Alexander: It is very much good news. Only if you know the map and the emotional and the thinking content of the map, then you can identify where you are in the path of transformation. Yes, the second path doesn't feel very good. It's not a great, wonderful, awesome experience, but it's absolutely critical as part of transformation and it's not where transformation ends.

Alexander: If we just look at the seasons of nature, autumn goes to winter before it gets to spring. Spring turns to summer and summer turns right back around to autumn. And this is exactly in a simple earth-based understanding of the real transformation. It's the same deep truth of Jesus the Christ that we're given in the wheel of the four gospels that Matthew is like the season of autumn and Mark is like the season of

winter and John is like the season of spring and Luke, summer. Luke-Acts is summer. The end of Luke-Acts, bends us right back around again to autumn and the text of Matthew. And that we have these gospel texts as the life of Jesus in us helping us understand where we are on the journey and where you are on the journey is where Jesus is at everything is okay even when it's an experience unto death.

Travis: And then when do you get saved?

Alexander: You get saved by walking the journey.

Travis: How so?

Alexander: Because the journey is the life of Jesus.

Travis: To get to the father, right?

Alexander: Well, the father and Jesus are one. The journey of transformation is an eminent incarnational experience of the Christ right down. This is heaven or there's no reality.

Travis: The Christ is relevant?

Alexander: Is Christ relevant? In my understanding, the Christ is the only relevance because in my understanding as a Christian, everything I see is the Christ. We'll talk more about this when we get to the gospel of John and the Prologue, but in essence a much better translation of the first line of John for us, for our ear and our hearts today is in the beginning was the Christ and the Christ was with God and the Christ is God.

Alexander: Another way of understanding that very same first sentence is in the beginning is the breath and the breath is with God and the breath is God. No thing comes to be. No thing comes to be except it comes to be through God's breath. And that breath has been the radiance of all people for all times. The breadth and the Christ is the visible cells of the cosmos.

Alexander: It the critical understanding in my mind. It's the most critical understanding in all of Christianity. To understand that Paul in giving us the name of our tradition, Paul did not name us as the tradition of [Yahwhosians 00:26:10]. We're not the traditions of Jesus alone. We are the tradition of Jesus, the Christ. We are the tradition of Jesus as

the one breath sweeping across the cosmos from the first moment of time. The stress is not on Jesus as the one. Jesus is the visible manifestation of the reality of the one breath. And what is most important for everyone is to find their way in to an experience and understanding of one breath that is sweeping across every cell of the cosmos.

Travis: You think, well, everything will breath together at once at some point?

Alexander: I think everything is already breathing together at once.

Alexander: Christianity at its beginning was a tradition of here and now. It was that a tradition of tomorrow and wait for something. It's a reality. One of the most radical things that anyone can do in reading the gospel text is change the verb. As long as the gospel texts verb is was, it reads as history. When the gospel text verb is intended to be is, and now, and here, what makes these stories true is that they are how the human heart grows and transforms.

Alexander: Now you begin to follow the stories as a living reality now, that's your verification. There's never going to be enough archeology and physics to prove something from 2000 years ago. How the heck could the early church in the fourth century know that it had the white texts? It knew it because the evident living grace in the text proved the reality of what the story itself. And that same proof is available to us today. It's the primary proof of the text.

SESSION TWO: Climbing Matthew's Great Mountain

Alexander: So we're going to explore what I call the first path and what Joseph Campbell termed as hearing the summons to the journey. But before we move ahead, just a small recap of this approach so that you can better understand where I'm going in this discussion of the first path and the gospel of Matthew.

Alexander: So my belief is, is that the early Christians, and by early Christians I mean the first three centuries of Christianity, knew and assumed from our Jewish mother that there was a definite four step or four path approach to how we walk with God in spirit. Four was the number that we assume for our mother, our mother, Judaism. Don't go crazy over the number four. It could be four and a half, it could be seven, it could be 11. Four was the Jewish metaphor. We assume that therefore we were looking for the four gospel texts where each of the four texts would match one of the four paths or parts of the journey. Secondly, that the texts were intended to be texts of here and now. And Paul taught us this, that certainly we have the historical story of Jesus, but that's not how we tell the story because Jesus is an eternal moment inside of time. Jesus is always a now and a here. And Paul taught us to see the stories of Jesus not as something that happened back then, but something that's happening right now in our present moment lives.

Alexander: Thirdly, Paul also taught us that we are followers of the Christ. We're followers of Jesus the Christ, but we're followers particularly of the Christ of all time. And so, the Christ does not begin when Jesus is born. The Christ has always been. And Jesus is the manifestation in the flesh of the eternal Christ of all time. And finally, because Christianity in the first century and second century was a developmental step in human consciousness. We could not simply bring people to Jesus. We had to create in them a path and a practice of transformation. So it is actually far easier to bring a person to understand Jesus than it is to form them in a certain way of living in a pantribal community, which we had not had on the planet to this moment, or at least we'd have no record of a pantribal community before the first century.

Travis: Why can't you just bring people to Jesus?

Alexander: Certainly we can bring people to Jesus, but the second part of that story is we have to bring people to the way of Jesus. And Jesus created a new moment in human history because we had never lived pantribal before. In the presence of Jesus, the Christ in the first century, we did something that we can find no antecedent of, which is people of differing tribes, people from differing blood lines, people from differing parts of the globe, people from differing socioeconomic class, people of different gender, all of us sitting together as brother and sister in what we call the new Jerusalem. And to desire to become part of that community is the first step. But the second part of that is to learn how to live in a way with people that for your whole life you've been taught are the other, the enemy, the anathema, the outsider, and now they are your brother and sister. And no matter how much love brings us to the desire to live together as one, the practice of it takes training and formation. Therefore, the gospel in four parts was chosen following the Jewish metaphor of Passover to be the Christian way of understanding and following Jesus into this wider living in love, compassion, justice, vitality, creativity, et cetera.

Alexander: So now, let's turn to the first path. Joseph Campbell's metaphor or way of naming the first path is hearing the summons, hearing the call to the journey. In Christianity, we're going to call this first path the text of the gospel of Matthew. And now let's historically situate this gospel. It's coming out of the community, we believe, of Antioch. Antioch is about 100 miles north of Jerusalem. Excuse me. It's about 200 miles north of Jerusalem. It's about a one week walk to walk from Jerusalem to Antioch. And what's happened is the temple in Jerusalem has been destroyed in 70, the Jewish priesthood has been ended by massacre because the emperor, the spatian, wanted to set his power on the empire and he wanted to show his hand somewhere in the empire to bring order out of the chaos of the three emperors in two years that had preceded him. To do this, he decided to make an example of the Jewish people. No, he didn't want to end the Jewish people. This was not Hitler. He wanted to end the Jewish faith because he believed that the Jewish religion had this festival every spring, which taught them that they had overthrown the Pharaoh and therefore it kept alive the belief that they could overthrow the Roman emperor.

Alexander: To end the Jewish faith, he knew he had to do three things. He had to annihilate the temple. He had to end the Jewish priesthood, which is a biological line. He had to end it by massacre. And thirdly, he wanted

to destroy much of the holy city of Jerusalem. He almost succeeded in his plan. There were a few children from the lines of the Levites and the Cohens that were secreted out of Jerusalem. But by the time that those terrible days were over, the temple was gone and the holy city of Jerusalem was sacked, much of it was torn down. And the Jewish people fled the holy city and didn't enter it for almost 40 years believing that it had been because of the sacrilege and the sacrifice and the martyrdom that had happened there. There was no desire to return to the great city.

Alexander: We turn now to Antioch because with Jerusalem effectively gone, Antioch is the city with the largest Jewish population in the Roman empire. And the desire was to win the hearts of the Jewish people in Antioch for what was going to come next. And there was a major argument that was happening within Judaism at this point. And there were many, many positions. One position was with the temple gone and the Jewish priesthood ended by massacre, this was the apocalypse and that the end was at hand and we should prepare ourselves to either die by flood or by fire.

Travis: I've heard that message before.

Alexander: Yeah. And just as an aside, we should always know that whenever we are in a time of change, and the greater the change, the stronger you're going to hear this apocalyptic voice, it is a psychological truth that goes through millennia, disregard it. Listen to it because it teaches us the level of change that we're in, but know that for the most part it is not the great truth of the moment.

Alexander: The second voice in Antioch was the voice of the moralist who was saying to the Jewish people, "You're bad. You're sinful. That the destruction of the temple and the massacre of the priesthood happened because of your moral impurity. So if you will return to a stricter observance of the law, Yahweh will favor you and give you the strength and the means to go back and regain Jerusalem, rebuild the temple, and rededicate the priesthood." Just as an aside, Judaism believes that they can't rededicate the priesthood without the temple.

Alexander: The third voice is the voice that perhaps many of us most identify with and it's the voice of this afternoon I've got to get the kids to ballet, to soccer practice, I've got all this work to do. We're working so hard.

When you theologians and political thinkers get all this solved, tell me. But in the moment, I just got to get to work and take care of my family. That's the upside of this. The downside of this is that we slip into all manner of addiction as a way to deaden the pain. The chaos and the questions are so large I can't handle it and so I'm just going to go to the pleasure principle and let someone else bear the responsibility of getting us out of this mess.

Alexander: The fourth position ends up being the position of we, the Jewish Christians of Antioch, hearing the text of the gospel of Matthew. The texts of the gospel of Matthew said to them and it says to us when we are in such a change moment, "You can do the woulda, coulda, shoulda all you want, but when you're ready to take a step in growth, I'm here. Put your hand in mine and we'll move forward. Even though the first place we move forward to is a place of uncertainty and trial." So this was the Christian Jewish population because what they were hearing Jesus the Christ say in their midst is, "In the midst of this chaotic, cataclysmic moment, this is not about shame, blame, or apocalypse, nor is it a matter of emotional paralysis. It's a matter of put your hand and your heart in mine and let's get back to work. There is a new and brighter future ahead."

Alexander: This is not that we look at the apocalypse and this cataclysmic moment as something that God deigned, but rather that no matter how dark and painful the moment may seem, God can make this work for our good. And this is the position of Matthew. And it starts with the way that Matthew tells the genealogy, which is a very, very strange genealogy because right in the midst of this long passage, which we think is about patriarchy and all the fathers who begot, who begot, who begot, well, first of all, the begot is that no matter how difficult times were, God's blessing remains.

Alexander: And secondly, in the midst of the genealogy, five times the genealogist tells us a very untoward story, not a story that you would usually include in a genealogy. But what the genealogist is saying to us is, "You think God comes to you because of moral purity? You think today's a bad day? Let me tell you your story. Let me tell you about Tamar, who is the daughter-in-law of Judah, who dresses as a Vestal Virgin, which we in our polite language might call a woman of the evening, and prays that Judah might come to her and lie with her before he goes into the temple to pray." Remember, this is 4,000 years ago. So that

she might conceive because her husband has been killed and she's childless and she's about to be removed from the line of Abraham and the tribe of Judah and she is so fearful. So she prays to God that God will have Judah come and lie with her and that she might conceive and so she can stay part of the line of the coming Messiah. And this is what happens.

Alexander: But Judah is also very smart because before she and Judah lie together, she asks Judah for his ring because she knows that if she does conceive that it will be Judah's right to have her executed for bringing shame on the family. And in fact, that's exactly what the scriptures tell us. They tell us that when Tamar began to show and Judah hears the news, he pronounces the death sentence. And Tamar does not dispute the sentence, she only asks for the favor to meet with Judah before she's killed. And upon that meeting, she produces his ring and we move on in the story of the line of the genealogy of Jesus the Christ, a line that over and over through these small stories that are inserted in the genealogy tell us, "You think that this is a bad day for you, you think that your personal world is going to a certain place in a hand basket. You don't know your story very well. You don't know the life of Yahweh very well. You don't know the grace of Jesus the Christ."

Alexander: Because the text of Matthew can be summed up in this way. Whenever your personal life, whenever your corporate life, whenever your civic life, whenever the life on the planet turns to a time that you are going to call a moment of great darkness, this is not the end, it's the beginning. This is the sounding bell underneath the first path and the gospel text of Matthew that whenever our personal and collective world is in a time of increasing darkness, encroaching darkness, this is not the end. This is the beginning. And so, the great hope that pervades underneath the text of Matthew is that when you are in such a time, return to even deeper spiritual practice and return to the presence and the grace of Jesus the Christ. Yes, there is enormous work about, but the future is bright if we will continue our prayer, our practice, and our belief in that new future eventually arriving.

Travis: When it's dark, the future is bright?

Alexander: Absolutely. This is why in Judaism and in Christianity up until 500 years ago, we started our sacred day at sundown because we wanted to teach ourselves every 24 hours that when you reach sundown, sundown marks the beginning moment of something new.

Alexander: Going into the dark is not in the sacred way. Going into the dark is not the end, it is the beginning. All new life ... Where does new life begin? Whether it's deep in the earth or deep in the womb, it begins in the place of darkness. And from that darkness will come growth and beautiful fresh radiance.

Travis: I thought if I got saved, I didn't have to go into the dark anymore.

Alexander: You don't have to go into the dark without hope. But you do have to go into the dark because God made the holy darkness. As the seven day story of creation, God created darkness and God created day and God saw that all was good.

Travis: That's in the Bible?

Alexander: That's in the Bible.

Travis: I'm going to have to read that.

Alexander: Yeah. Actually, I think that the many of the translations will say, "And God created night and God created day and God saw that all was good." So as we ... There is so much in each story and chapter of Matthew, it continues to deepen our understanding of what the feeling, emotional feeling, and thinking content is when we're on the first path and we're walking it with Jesus the Christ.

Alexander: One of the next things that we'll hear in Matthew's text is only in Matthew do we have brought forward the story of what Jesus said, "You know what the law and the prophets have said to you, but now I say." And whatever comes after the now I say was stunning and it appears like it is a reversal of what we've always known. It's not. But on the first path, it feels like it because we, in the past, up to this day, we've been living a small awareness of God, a small awareness of life. And now Jesus the Christ wants us to have more life, more vitality, but we don't get there without going through unlearning. And so, when Jesus the Christ says, "And now I say to you," he's giving us a thought which is beyond where we are today and we're not going to

understand. It's an intentional act of confusion because we have to let go of our thinking from yesterday and we have to let go of our thinking from yesterday without a fully formed thinking of tomorrow. We have to go through a time of holy not knowing. It's part of our accepting the first path.

Alexander: And as we move deeper into the text of Matthew, I think of each gospel having a signature moment which sort of sums up the deepest practice of Jesus the Christ in our lives in this path. And in Matthew, I think that signature moment is the way Matthew gives us Jesus the Christ's passion. Now, when I talk about the passion, it's built upon the historical actions in Jerusalem, but it's not told as Jerusalem's story. Matthew's passion is the passion of the Christian Jews in Antioch wrestling with this summons to a larger future that is going to potentially have many people misunderstanding and not accepting them. And so what Matthew brings forward to us, and it's always ... Every passion doesn't create new detail. What I'm saying is every passion chooses from the details of what happened to give us the spiritual practice of that path. And the spiritual practice of that path, of the first path, is receiving the way Jesus receives Judas at the moment of the arrest in Matthew's passion. And if you read the text very closely, you will know that two lines before the arrest, Jesus says to the disciples, "Look, the betrayer is at hand." And then Judas comes to Jesus and Jesus allows Judas to kiss him and then Jesus says to Judas, "Friend, do what you have come to do."

Alexander: Now this is the deep core practice of the first path. When we say to God and we say to spirit, "We are in situations not of our making and not, very possibly, not of our own guilt in any way. Something has befallen us which is not of our desire." And rather than strike back in judgment and blame and acrimony and bitterness, what God asks us to do is to receive the work of this moment. That doesn't mean that we approve of what happened. It doesn't mean that we don't see justice in some way for what happened, but it means that in the spiritual frame, in the difficult moment of the first path where we've got the ash of yesterday's temple and thought and belief all over us, in this moment through the power and the grace of Jesus the Christ, we can, we too can look into the pain and the betrayal and say, "God, Jesus, spirit, mother, do help me do what you are asking me to do in my inner life for my own growth and my continued to transformation."

Alexander: So as we move through Matthew's passion, you're going to note how Matthew brings forward all the historical elements of betrayal and amplifies it. Not for us to go back to Jerusalem and to retry that trial. Not in any way to have thoughts about what happened back in those days, but to realize that this passion is here and now and who's on trial is you. Are you going to accept the work of spirit? Something has befallen you and spirit is asking you to pick up the work of it. How are you going to receive this moment for your growth in transformation and love?

Alexander: And so then we can move to the very end of this gospel. And the disciples are directed to go to the Mount in Galilee. And I love this element because I'm Lebanese, I'm first generation Lebanese. I grew up in a Lebanese village that just happened to be in Birmingham, Alabama. I grew up with my [Lebanese 00:25:25], my grandfather and my [Lebanese 00:25:28], my grandmother. I grew up in the old ways. And I understand the old ways are in my bones. And I know that if the evangelist had given us the name of the Mount of resurrection, that my [Lebanese 00:25:46] would have been there 30 minutes before you'd get there with the souvenir stand.

Alexander: Have you ever thought about the stunning, shocking detail of not naming the new mountain of the resurrection? Because, and remember that this text is written to the Jewish Christians of Antioch who've just lost the temple, they've just lost their priesthood, and they've just lost the holy city. Wouldn't the most natural thing for us to do to comfort each other is to name the place that the risen Christ appears to us? And yet Matthew does not give us the name of that mountain precisely because, and I would like all of Christianity to hear this today, I would like every spiritual tradition to hear this today, Jesus the Christ is ahead of us, not behind us. There is nothing of yesterday to go back to when you're wearing the ashes of the old temple. The only place to go is forward. And Jesus the Christ emphasizes that when the disciples are there. He says, "And now I'm going to send you out everywhere." Well, gee, gosh, thank you Jesus. I want the GPS, I want the bank account, I want the blueprint. And Jesus doesn't give any of that and none of us get any of that at the end of the first path. What we get is Jesus asking us to put our hand in his and let's go to an unknown future. To tell the disciples to go everywhere.

Alexander: Because in the four gospel path that we're on, the end of Matthew was not the great commissioning, that comes in Luke. We're only at the end of the first chapter of a four chapter book. And at this point, Jesus is telling us to go out, very much almost like Tolkien, go out and wander and be lost. Because what I want you to learn in the second path is that in your lostness, I'm there. And that's the only thing that should matter to you. That the new realizations that are going to come to you are going to come further down the journey. But to get those new realizations, you've first got to forget what was, you've got to move beyond what has been. You need to grieve it and release it and clear yourself out for the new. Because as long as your focus is on what was, you will never be able to see the new.

Travis: Why?

Alexander: Because you can't see the new when you're clinging to the old. Your mind, your thought, your mind, your feeling is always on what was. You're eating it, you're smelling it, you're desiring it. You've got to release it and let God do something new with you. I mean, in a very pragmatic and visceral way, I used to do some work with congregations who had lost a church building, usually by some horrific fire. And my work with them, the first thing was to get them not to move too quickly to the new building committee. Go into the social hall, go into the tent, play around with the chairs, let your community live themselves into a new form of being with each other. And then, out of that new life that you have in your midst, then begin to decide the shape and the form of the church to be built.

Alexander: It's the same way for us. That's a dramatic example, but it's the same way for us in our own lives. When we lose something, we often immediately want to build something or create something that was just the way it was. And that's precisely not what the spirit wants us to do. The spirit wants us to be here and now and listen deeply to the newness and the freshness that the spirit is inviting us to. But to get there, we've got to go in a journey.

Travis: Darn it.

Alexander: Yeah.

Travis: Can't you get it and then go? You got to go and get it?

Alexander: Nope. You know, I didn't make the law. God created this sequence of how we transform, and this is one of the universal laws of transformation, that we have to go through a release is one word, a stripping is another word, a forgetting as another word. We have to go through a cleaning before we can truly live and see and know something new.

Alexander: You go through dark times, but dark times are not the end of the story. Dark times are the early part in the beginning in the story. Remind yourself of that every day. Make sunset and the 20 minutes after sunset every day, make it a spiritual practice to stop and watch the sky turn dark and remember that that early darkness is the beginning of the new day. And what is true in the outer world is also true for us in the inner world.

Alexander: Not going to lie, the first path is challenging and it's difficult. Largely, it's difficult because when we step out, sometimes we discover that friends and family around us aren't there supporting us. What I want you to do is there is a community out there around my work, they're ready to receive you. There are many people out there who are ready to go on the journey with you, to walk shoulder in shoulder to this new uncertain future that we're facing. The greater future beyond that uncertainty, it's there waiting for us. But to get there, we've got to go shoulder to shoulder into a place of unknowing and let God lead us. To do that today, it's scary.

Travis: And you're trying to sell greater uncertainty?

Alexander: I am trying to sell greater uncertainty because it is truth.

Travis: What's there?

Alexander: There is the truth, there is the certainty beyond the uncertainty. And that's what we're all reaching for. And I don't know when we're going to get there, but I know we will. And if you go on this journey with me through these series of short films and through the book, we're going to get to the certitude that Mary prays on the fourth path. And I just want to bring it back to the first path. Right there at the beginning of the fourth gospel, Luke, Mary, in a moment of great personal difficulty and cultural difficulty, she prays the future as an event that has already happened because she has learned to trust God's promise. This journey of transformation is about moving beyond hope to knowing,

to the knowing that Mary had that God's promise will not leave us no matter how difficult, no matter how large, no matter how cataclysmic the challenges are that we face. God is here. And if we do our small part, ultimately all will be well.

SESSION THREE: Crossing Mark's Stormy Sea

Alexander: Today we're going to explore what I call the second path. Joseph Campbell talked about the second path as a time of great trials and obstacles. If we continue with the Jewish metaphor of the coming out of Egypt, this is the time in the wilderness. The early Christian Church, I believe, rightly chose the gospel of Mark to be the Christian experience of being in a time like unto death where we walk by the power of the resurrection. Let's look at where we believe Mark was composed, the city of Rome in 64, 65, 1st century. Now in July of 64 is the great fire of Rome where Rome was set on fire and burned for five nights and five days. The fire was extinguished. A day later it reignited and it burned for another two days. At the end of this time, the great heart of the seat of government in Rome had burned and most of the homes of the aristocracy had burned.

Alexander: Well, the sad synchronicity is, is that this was precisely the area of Rome that the emperor Nero wished to tear down and rebuild in an architectural style that he believed would rival Athens. Essentially, Nero had just been before the Roman Senate saying to them that he thought that the government and the homes of the aristocracy were an architectural dump. He was quite surprised that this news was not received well. Then when the fire accomplished exactly what he desired, of course the Roman Senate turned on him and Nero needed a scapegoat. That scapegoat became the usual scapegoat in the city of Rome, which was the Jewish community which already twice before in the 1st century had been expelled. What we don't know is exactly what happened next. We know the effect of it, but somehow Nero was convinced by someone that it was not the entirety of the Jewish community who had set Rome on fire, but rather this small rebelrousing group of Jews known as the Christus followers, the Christ believers.

Alexander: Nero was told that these believers had this figure that they saw as greater than the emperor and who had come to abolish the Roman Empire. Well, that's all Nero needed to have his perfect scapegoat. What he does now is horrendous and it actually becomes a model centuries later for Adolf Hitler. He sends his soldiers into the Jewish ghetto, knocking on doors, door by door, and coming to the head of the household. Each head of household had to answer the door and

they had to answer a question. Are you a believer in the Christ, the Christus? If you answer yes, you and your entire family down to your grandchildren will be immediately seized, taken to the Circus Maximus and summarily executed. If you say no, the horror is not over because now you must name someone else who is going to be seized. Their family's going to be seized and they're going to be taken to the Circus Maximus, and they're not even going to be given a chance to answer the question.

Alexander: They're going to die on your report. When that knock on the door comes, someone is going to die. Is it going to be your family or is it going to be another Jewish family that you know? If you were to choose the third option, which is to not answer the question, then the soldiers would seize you and your family and take you to the Circus Maximus for death. In the midst of this horror, in the midst of this small Holocaust and genocide, we have the birth of the gospel form because here in Rome we had the perfect soil of the creation of a new art form. The first art form of this early tradition we call Christianity. We had Peter in Rome giving the historical eyewitness and we had Paul in Rome teaching us how to change the historical eyewitness to a present moment reality and we had a moment of tremendous tragedy, those three elements.

Alexander: As we know, often great power and great beauty comes forth out of moments of tremendous horror. What happens here in the creation of the gospel of Mark will be followed by the creation of the other three gospels. The gospel will be built on the historical eyewitness but not told as historical eyewitness, told as present moment event. What we have in the text of Mark is the prayer and the song of this community as they are locked in their houses waiting for that fateful knock on the door. You can see and you can feel in the way this text is composed and the stories that make part of it, how this supported this early Christian community that's surrounded and about to be exterminated. How it allowed them by the power of the resurrection to go to their death with great serenity, great peacefulness.

Alexander: We know that they did because we actually have a historical record of the Romans going to the Circus Maximus and watching these executions and becoming quite bored because the Christians were not giving them the drama that they had come to see. They were not crying out for their life. That here on the floor of the Circus Maximus as they died, they died with a noble presence. I would suggest to you that such nobility cannot be faked. That nobility, the ability in this moment of extremis, to face with peacefulness and calm, comes because you know the power of the resurrection already in your heart and in your life. Let's turn now to the text and how this text opens. It opens with the story, which I like to call a meditation. It opens with the meditation on John the Baptist. Now, why would this meditation be so appropriate to these Jewish Christians in Rome about to be executed?

Alexander: Well, as we know in the story, John the Baptist is crying out in a wilderness about the presence of God. These Jewish Christians in Rome know that they are in a like wilderness. That in fact, they are John the Baptist in this moment and that they are going to have to proclaim something which is unpopular and that may actually hasten their death. It goes even further because we know that John the Baptist died, was executed on the whim of a drunken governor and the Jewish Christians in Rome could certainly identify with this because they were about to die because an emperor needed a scapegoat. Rather than this text though, being about a moment of horror, the text is about the power of the resurrection. One of the things that I will talk about it with each one of the four gospels is, the gospel is the practice of resurrection in the midst of the trauma and the question of a community.

Alexander: It's not a gospel which just has a story about resurrection at the end. The whole gospel is infused with the grace and the power of the resurrection. That this gospel of Mark is how can you walk through the valley of the shadow of death? By the power of Jesus, the Christ, and the grace of resurrection in your heart. God is in this text, not leaving us abandoned, but God is giving us the very power of the resurrection to be with us to face and move through this moment. This is the reason that the early church could so rightly in my view, discern the text of Mark is the text of the second path.

Alexander: That moment having begun the journey in the first path and having been sent out to wilderness where we will be stripped, where we will have to unlearn, where we will have to accept and make uncertainty welcome in our hearts. That in this place, the presence of God is not in the glory of certitude and home and temple. The presence of God is in the emptiness. The presence of God is in the desert. The presence of God is in our welcoming a fierce inner landscape, perhaps even at times welcoming a fierce outer landscape just like this meditation on John the Baptist.

Alexander: The next core piece about Mark is the evangelist has used the topography of Israel and brought it forward to Rome. Now, one of the odd things is, is that the Circus Maximus, where these early Christians are going to die. Remember that the Coliseum is not built until the end of the 1st century. These first martyrdoms are happening at the Circus Maximus which is an oval-shaped building. The shape of the Circus Maximus has an odd similarity to Sea of Galilee. Mark sets Jesus the Christ walking around the Sea of Galilee. But here's the piece that most of us have forgotten about the Sea of Galilee in the 1st century and to the Jewish heart. The Sea of Galilee was a cemetery and a place of death that was horrific to the Jewish people. They did not think of this as a place to go and sunbathe. This is not water that they wanted to touch. They wanted nothing to do with this tomb.

Alexander: This place where the storms on the Sea of Galilee come up so swiftly that people that go out onto the Sea to fish are facing death at every moment. What this also informs us is these disciples that Jesus calls to be his first followers are not simpletons. They are courageous heroes to the Jewish people because they are ready or willing to face death for life. They're willing for a people who are starving, they are willing to go out on the Sea of Galilee, which is a place of taboo so that they can bring fish back for their families and their communities. What's so powerful about this is that water in the text of Mark ... Let's remember there are many associations to water and we'll get another association when we get to the third path in the gospel of John.

Alexander: Water in the text of Mark is death and this line of death and in the Jewish idiom, water is the place that the demons live. Water is what swept the world away in the flood. Water is what kept them enslaved in Egypt, and the water of the Galilee carries all of those associations. When Jesus puts the fishermen into the boat at night and orders

them ... He doesn't invite them. He doesn't suggest. Jesus orders them to get into the boat at night and cross the Sea of Galilee. This is craziness. This is insanity. The fishermen know this. Nobody in their right mind is going to get in a boat and go out on this storm-tossed sea when you can't see the storm coming. One of the things that the gospel of Mark teaches us as the gospel of Mark taught the early Christians in Rome is, is that God wants us to go through certain storms in our life.

Alexander: God is not here to put a band-aid and lead us away from the storm. That there are certain moments, and the second path is a profound moment, when God directs us to get into the boat and go into the storm. Not alone, but with him. We are made, we as Christians are made for these moments because it is through these moments that the incarnational faith becomes more than a hope. It becomes a deep knowing and a trust. Therefore you can hear in this text of the first storm where the disciples were in the boat and Jesus ... Where is Jesus in this text? Jesus is in the back of the boat. Now, anybody who knows ships and boats in a storm, where do you want to be? You want to be in the back of the boat. You don't want to be in the bow. You don't want to be in the front because that's the part that takes the brunt of the storm.

Alexander: Jesus has got the cushy place in the back and secondly, the evangelist tells us that Jesus is asleep. Well, isn't that nice? We're in a storm and our God's asleep. He's here, but he's asleep. Then the evangelist even amps it up more by saying, well, and Jesus has got his head resting on a pillow and water is coming in the boat and our God's in the back asleep comfortably. Peter cries out, "Wake up. Do you not know we're going down? Wake up." Can you hear the Jewish Christians in Rome waiting for that fateful knock on the door? Do something. Get us out of this situation. Jesus wakes up and calms the outer storm but the deeper truth in this text is that Jesus calms our inner storm and then gives us the great examination of conscience. Where is your faith? Where is your faith?

Alexander: That was the examination given to the Jewish Christians in Rome who almost certainly were looking at their death. It's the same examination of conscience that's given to us today with all the cataclysmic events that are around us and the voice that we hear today very loudly, "We're going down" and our God is saying, I am here. Where is your

faith? Let's move to the very end of this gospel text. There is so much I would love to share with you. Unfortunately, it is written, I hope well in the book. The original end of this gospel, and excuse me, but about a hundred years later, there was a second ending added to the gospel which is not part of the tapestry of this text. The story may be true, but it doesn't fit the text.

Alexander: The original ending of the gospel is Mary and the women come to the tomb and they find the stone rolled back and they go in and we are told that there is a young man sitting there. Note that in this text we don't even get the story of an angel. It's just a young man dressed in white sitting there and he says to them, "Jesus of Nazareth has gone ahead of you to Galilee." Well, isn't that nice? Because the word [galilee 00:18:52] here refers to the Galilean Sea, the place, the tomb, the place of chaos, the place of your deepest anxiety. At this moment of resurrection, we're told, go to the place of your deepest concerns, the place where you feel most empty, most starved, most thirsty. Go there and that is where the risen one is waiting for you.

Alexander: Then finally we hear this instruction to the women to go and tell the disciples. Then comes the stunning last line of the text. Stunning last line of a text written to a people facing their own genocide. It says, "And the women fled from the tomb for fear and amazement had overtaken them and they said nothing to anyone." End of gospel. The way that I understand this is, this gospel is an examination of conscience. This gospel says, when the knock comes on the door, what's going to be your answer? It goes even further by saying, essentially, if you only know resurrection as a report by someone else, you're not a follower of the Christ and there's no need for you to go to the Circus Maximus and die. If you know the resurrection as a living reality in your heart, you know the answer that you must give at that door.

Alexander: This awesome and perhaps terrifying moment is the original end of the text written to the Jewish Christians in Rome as they waited at table for the Roman Centurion to give the knock at the door. We too, as we travel the second spiritual path, as we find ourselves faced with tremendous anxiety and uncertainties. As we find ourselves perhaps with depressions and even perhaps despair, we're asked ultimately what will be our answer to this moment. Can we too go more deeply into the difficulties at this moment and experience the resurrection

here and now in our hearts? I would like to end with offering you a prayer that comes from our brothers and sisters in the Buddhist tradition, which I think of as a summarization of the second path. It's a prayer that they often pray as they sit down to begin meditation.

Alexander: That prayer, that intention is, "Grant that I may be given the appropriate difficulties and sufferings on this journey so that my heart may be awakened and my practice of compassion and liberation for all beings may be fulfilled." I'd like to invite Christians today to find this sentiment in our own words through the gospel of Mark. That this text is not about our crying out for God to change the circumstances, but rather for us to invite the appropriate difficulties and suffering so that our faith may become deeper.

SESSION FOUR: Resting in John's Glorious Garden

Alexander: So today we're going to explore the third path. And Joseph Campbell called this third path, receiving the boon or receiving the gift. And in the Jewish metaphor of the coming out of Egypt, this is the crossing of the Jordan into the Promised Land. And in my work, I would describe the third path as the experience of joy and union. For this third path, the early Christians, again, I believe rightly discerned that this is the gospel of John. So let's look at the history of this text and the community of Ephesus, late first century.

Alexander: With the arrival of Jesus and the birth of the Christian tradition, we did something in the first century that was unheard of, and if there were other earlier examples of this in human history, they sadly died out without leaving a record of their work. Now, what is it that Christianity did that was such a huge sociological and emotional and psychological step forward? We are the first tradition on record to be pan tribal. We're the first tradition that said it no longer matters who your mama is. It no longer matters what bloodline you have in your body. It no longer matters what your socioeconomic status is. It no longer matters whether you are male or female. It no longer matters whether you are free or slave. We have a table, come.

Alexander: Now this is Judaism, our mother tradition, has the teaching that all are one, but the way that they organize that, and it is simply another way to organize is that is, that all those different categories would have their own place of worship. But the concept of the world's peoples sitting shoulder to shoulder in common worship and common service is not something we see on the planet before the first century in the followers of Jesus.

Alexander: Well, that understanding that all can become one is like receiving the beatific vision and it comes with a power and an electricity. However, the greater work is not only receiving the vision, it's knowing what the vision means and then how to create and serve it. So we know that Ephesus founded by Paul or founded by a disciple of Paul, was that community that first matured in hearing this vision of oneness and matured in to actually creating a worship space where the world's diversity would sit at that table. Ephesus was the perfect soil for this because it was the Eastern capital of the Roman empire and it had

peoples in Ephesus arguing before the Roman courts from North of Africa all the way to India. We also know that Ephesus had a very lively woman's community. We know that in Ephesus were many women's temples.

Alexander: We also know that Ephesus was wealthy. It was outside of Rome, perhaps the wealthiest city in the empire. And why was that? It wasn't because of the Roman courts. Ephesus was the center of the Roman slave trade, underneath this beautiful city where up here we're hearing Paul's preaching about oneness, underneath Ephesus are caverns where the slaves were kept chained to the walls. So we have in Ephesus this beautiful over city and this painful, chaotic under city. And yet here we hear this message from Paul and from this community about the oneness of all people and we can now know that that message is being preached into the teeth of the power of the empire and the economic base of this city.

Alexander: So what we also know is that when we get these moments of expansion and awareness and we get this sense about, "Oh, we can move to greater oneness and harmony and union," that that moment is immediately followed by a huge blow back by an enormous resistance. I used to do a lot of youth work and high school work and teen retreats and we would always hope that about two o'clock on Sunday afternoon, all of our teens would be hugging on each other, and loving on each other, and professing Jesus, and they were going to take care of each other, et cetera. You always love and hope that that moment happens, that the grace of that moment comes on a teen retreat.

Alexander: But we also knew that the deeper work is... A week or two back at high school, back in the hallways, back where all the old peer pressure and all the old ins and out tribes that live at a high school, and they begin to eat away at that sense of oneness and that sense of mutual care and they can eat away at it so profoundly that a teenager would begin to doubt the vision because it doesn't seem like the vision can be sustained in real life.

Alexander: This is the third path, this is what's happening in Ephesus. 50 years after Ephesus had been created as an expression of this pan tribal, new spiritual tradition, by the nineties the hierarchies, the privileges, the ins and the outs, the Gentiles and the Jews, it's all come crashing

down, and this community of love has now become a community where they're at each other's throats. And so what John has to do in this text is affirm the vision and then give the spiritual practices that help the community sustain and nurture, and go deeper into the actual creating of a communion of union and harmony.

Alexander: So John starts out his text, one of the first religious texts ever composed to be a text for all people. All the other gospels are written primarily for Jewish Christians. This text is written about all people. And so John starts out by talking in the prologue as we mentioned earlier in the introduction to this series, the one breath, the one breath, the outbreath of God, which is sweeping through every cell of the cosmos. The outbreath of God is in fact the cosmos. The cosmos is not God, the cosmos is the visible expression of God's breath. The cosmos is the moving cells of God's breath and therefore God created the cosmos to be one. All of the billions and billions of particles and cells and creatures were already one.

Alexander: In essence, John says, what... Something that Thomas Merton, the monk of the '50s and the '60s in the United States said when he said, "We are already one, but we fear we are not. We're already one, but we fear we are not." This is John's proclamation, we are one, all people are one, all people have the one breath moving through them. Let us come together in mutual understanding and mutual education to understand how each of us is a distinct type of cell in God's breath.

Alexander: So John raises us up at the beginning of his text with this beatific vision he wants us to have, whether it's deep calm or a scintillating experience in our bodies of how all is one, in the same way... I don't know that you can see the beautiful setting that we're sitting in, in this gorgeous tree that's over my shoulder, this tree that's like the tree of the cosmos, this tree which holds the under structure, this level and the heavens together, we're already all interconnected and John is going to move the two more metaphors that we might miss.

Alexander: He's going to use the image of stone. He's going to call Peter and he's going to tell Peter that Peter is rock. Well, the word that John uses can be variously translated rock or stone, and it's the same thing. Rock and stone in the Mediterranean world is the incorruptible substance. Basically, John is not just saying to Peter, only you are rock, because Peter in John's gospel stands for every woman and every man and all

of creation, and Jesus is saying to Peter and to you and to I, you are made of an incorruptible substance. There is nothing you will ever do that will ever take away the fact that you are already made of the incorruptible substance of God. Now you can cover it over, you can run away from it, you've got free will, there are all sorts of ways that you can respond to that, but John's gospel is calling us home to the deepest reality that everyone is part of the seamless tapestry of the one breath, the incorruptible substance.

Alexander: And so then, now that we know that I am stone, and you are stone, and we are stone, we have to go to the wedding at Cana. And the wedding at Cana is the end of this beatific vision that John wants to give us. And the wedding at Cana is the wedding of us, now we can't find Cana, archeologically we can't find Cana anywhere in Palestine in the first century. Cana is the inner place of our wedding and what is right there in that text is we hear about these vessels made of stone that are filled with water that is going to be changed into wine.

Alexander: First of all, because we've not connected stone from Peter with us. We know that this wedding is the wedding of us and we're told that these vessels, these stone vessels are in two sizes. And would it surprise you to know that the larger size is roughly the weight of a Mediterranean man in the first century and the smaller size is roughly the weight of a Mediterranean woman? And John tells us that there are six of them, which immediately takes us back to the sixth day of creation when God created us female and male. And this whole metaphor of the wedding is, know that you are already wedded but you are water and you must go through the slow process of transformation to become the elixir of wine that God intends you to be for yourself and primarily for each other and for the world.

Alexander: Now, John is a lot like Paul who he... Paul always raises us up and then starts the lessons and so does John, because right after this we're going to hear about Jesus getting quite passionate and angry and cleansing the temple. And again, we're on the third path here. This text, I don't know, a better sacred text of the third path than the gospel of John, and it could be the limitation of my understanding. But in everything I know about the third path is here in this text because right after get the aha and the wider understanding of the vision, what we must do is what Jesus does, we must cleanse the old temple because the tendrils

of the old temple, if we are not aware of them, will choke the life breath of the new out of us.

Alexander: And so John, in this chapter about Jesus cleansing the temple has given us exactly the right practice and from this moment in John's gospel all the way to the beginning of the passion and the foot washing, chapter, by chapter, by chapter is about how our thinking and our feeling styles will keep the old temple alive unless we are very careful and we use our best awareness and we keep trying to cleanse ourselves of the tendrils of the old so that the new can actually be birthed.

Alexander: And I want to go one step further, there's not the time at this moment to do all the incredible powerful texts in John, again, there's a book that is I think well-written that takes you through these great exercises, but one of the ones that is very important to us to know is Nicodemus. And Nicodemus is the tragic figure of John. He's not a bad man, he's caught in the tendrils of yesterday's temple. He sees Jesus's goodness. He's drawn to the goodness of Jesus, but he's got an intellectual dilemma from yesterday's thinking, he's caught. Nicodemus is the natural law guy. And natural law is no great place to stand before God unless the natural law is that God is always moving ahead of us and always creating us in larger awareness, that's the natural law.

Alexander: So Nicodemus comes to Jesus and he says, "Well, Jesus, my tradition has told me, and I know it's true that unless you take an adult already born and put them back in a Jewish mother and give them Jewish blood, they can't have the privilege to know Yahweh. Jesus, how are you going to do that?" This is where Nicodemus is caught in the old tribalism of blood, in the face of the community of Ephesus, which has said no longer do we have one sacred bloodline, every bloodline is sacred. All people, all creatures, every grain of sand in the cosmos is sacred. But Nicodemus who learned something good and Holy yesterday and set it in stone, doesn't know how to be the disciple of a God who is always reshaping our thinking and helps us know that I am doing something new today, can you not perceive it?

Alexander: This is why so much of the second path was about clearing out the old, clearing out the tendrils of the old, so that when we truly understand the gift that we've been given and the gift that God and Spirit are asking us to move forward, we can move forward in newness, in freshness, in expansion. Because if we don't, what's going

to happen is we're going to gild yesterday's temple and we're going to call it new and it's not, and we're going to be hurting ourselves and hurting each other, and we're not going to be moving to the table of union and oneness that is God's intent for us.

Alexander: Although there is so much, so much, so much, so much to say about John's text, let's look just for a moment at John's passion because it is quite a distinct, different passion. As in this passion, Jesus does not suffer. And really I ask you to read John's passion and forget for the moment, don't tear it up, but just forget for the moment, Matthew, Mark and Luke's passion and look at John's passion. Look at the fact that in John, Jesus dies before Passover. That in John the final meal with the disciples is not Passover because Passover hasn't started yet. In John, there is no text of Jesus taking cup and taking bread. In John, there is no prayer that the cup be passed, in fact, five times in the text of John Jesus says, "I have come for this moment, give me the cup." The disciples object and Jesus is quite strong about this is what I have come to do.

Alexander: John's text is the text of great selfless giving, the type of selfless giving that I see in parents, the type of selfless giving that I see in people who are out there advocating for wider justice at the risk of their own lives. And in John's text, there is no counting of the cost, there's no bloody Jesus. Jesus makes the decision to die. Jesus puts himself on the cross. In John nobody puts Jesus on the cross, he puts himself there. And that beautiful moment in John, when Jesus dies, there's an argument between the various parts of Christianity about how that text should be translated [inaudible 00:21:24].

Alexander: Because I understand the text as the text of the third path that teaches me how this term should be translated. Most people will translate Jesus's words at his death as, and Jesus bows his head and delivers over his spirit. No, as some scholars, including Raymond Brown, who I think of as the greatest scholar of John's text will say, the correct translation should be, and Jesus bows his head and delivers over the spirit. In John, this moment from the cross is Pentecost. It takes us back to the first lines of the Book of John, where God breathe out, and Jesus from the cross at his last moment, breathe out a new Pentecost upon us. Please, please, please, if you're praying this text on Good Friday, surround it with joy and jubilation, this is no moment to

be on your knees, it's a moment to be on your feet giving praise to a God who is breathing us into a new Pentecost. Hallelujah.

Alexander: And so John's text moves to the very last scene. And again, it pains me to be so short on the text of John because there is so much here. But let's move right ahead to Jesus and Peter at the lake, the Lake of Tiberias. And Jesus is going to ask Peter three times, do you love me? And Peter is going to say yes and he's getting really upset that Jesus keeps asking the question. And Jesus then is going to say to Peter, "Peter, if you love me, feed my sheep, take care of the lambs." This is code language. The shepherds of the first century are not the glorified figures from a thousand years earlier during the time of King David. Shepherds in the first century are thieves, brigands, rapists, perhaps pedophiles, murderers, they have so disrupted society that they are removed from their villages and made to do the work of the least and the lowly out in the fields where they will smell like sheep. And smelling like sheep is better than having a bell around your neck because somebody knows who you are a block a way.

Alexander: So at the end of this gospel of magnificence where we have been told that each one of us has the heartbeat of our God and the cosmos inside, we have that glory, but that glory will only be made manifest when we can do the work of the least, and the lowly, and the despised, and the outcast. When we place ourselves with them and see in them the magnificence, then truly we will know that we are all one, for we will know there is no one who is not invited through this door to our table.

Alexander: So John's text is that about in the presence of Jesus the Christ, we have reentered the garden. That in any way, if we thought the old garden had to Seraphim, barring the way back in the presence of Jesus the Christ, those are removed. The doorway to the garden is open, welcome. But that's the first part. But the second part of the story is now you have to be the garden wherever you go. The garden is no longer a place back there, or over there, ahead of us, or behind us, or to the side of us, in John's understanding where you are is the garden.

Alexander: And in the situations that you live, find the garden, and remember that the image of the garden is the image of everything. That in the garden you have flowers blooming, you have flowers decaying, you have worms in the soil, in essence you have the whole journey in every

garden image. Although we may tend to think of the garden as perhaps that springtime blossoming, but in essence, the garden image is, here is the beauty of every moment on the journey and every moment and every place is the presence of Jesus the Christ.

SESSION FIVE: Walking Luke's Road of Riches

Alexander : So, we come now to the fourth path and the fourth gospel, which in this way of understanding our gospels is the gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles. We're turning again to the metaphor that Joseph Campbell gave us. The fourth part of the great one story of all of humanity is what he calls returning to community with larger responsibility. And in the Jewish metaphor of the journey out of Egypt, we have to remember that arriving in the promised land is the third path. But then it took the Jewish people 200 years after arriving in the promised land before they made that into their everyday nation state.

Alexander : And this fourth path, which is about the work after receiving the new vision, after having the greater awareness, after some understanding of an aspect of your giftedness is the work of making this part of your everyday ordinary reality. And sadly, this fourth part is the part that is least discussed, least taught, that somehow we have come to believe that just having the awareness does the work. And it doesn't.

Alexander : So, this fourth part of the journey, this story in practice that Luke/Acts give us is critically essential if we are going to live into the fullness and the vitality of our own authenticity and be of service to others into the world.

Alexander : So, let's look at historically what's going on at the time that Luke/Acts is written. And let's also remember that Luke/Acts is one continuous body of work and initially, the whole account was considered the gospel. We believe that Luke/Acts is coming out of the mid-eighties of the first century. We also believe that it was written from the city of Antioch. Remember that Matthew was written to the Jewish Christian community in Antioch. Luke is written from Antioch as a book, much like some of Paul's writings, to be circulated around the Mediterranean to all these new emerging Christian communities. If you're listening closely there, I said something that I haven't said up to this point in our discussion, and that is a Christian community, which no longer sees itself as Jewish. What happens in the mid-eighties is we now have this terrible, tragic divorce, mutual divorce really, between our mother tradition Judaism and ourselves.

Alexander : Now, how did this come about? Well, after the Temple was destroyed and the priesthood was ended by massacre, Judaism had no leadership left. There was no one physically alive who had the right to be a spiritual leader of the tradition of Judaism. And so, there was this middle manager group that stepped into the void and this middle manager we call the Pharisee, and we tended to have looked down on the Pharisee as sort of a less-than group. Whereas to the Jewish tradition, the Pharisees are the heroes. The Pharisees are the ones who hold Judaism together between the time of the Temple and 150 to 200 years later, the birth of the Rabbinical movement, which is still the major tradition of Judaism today. But like all of us, the Pharisees were quite anxious that their 2000-year-old tradition was seeming to be hanging by the ropes.

Alexander : And in this 10, 15 years after the destruction of the temple, the Pharisees could not legislate because they weren't the priests, they weren't the Sadducees. They were the moral interpreters of the law, but they in no way could create the law. But they had the position of leadership and in that position, they had the power of persuasion. And so, the Pharisee was trying to persuade synagogue by synagogue for the Jewish people to remove anyone from synagogue life who believed that the Messiah had already arrived because the Pharisee understood that if this idea that the Messiah had already arrived, it would take away from the power to return to Jerusalem and restore the Temple, and that it would further fracture the Jewish people who were already feeling quite on the ropes and in the void.

Alexander : Now, for the Pharisees to advocate the removal of anyone from Jewish life that believed the Messiah had already come, largely meant the Christian community. There were other small variant groups that also believed that the Messiah had come or was just about to come. But the major impact of this was that we were fingered as the belief that would further fracture Judaism and potentially be the end of the 2000-year-old tradition.

Alexander : So, when they were advocating that we would be removed from synagogue life, it actually had a great raw punch to it. What this means in the Middle East, I saw it in my Lebanese family, this is the downside of the tribes of the Middle East, is is that when someone is considered dangerous, they have a thought or a belief, which is something that the tribe does not in any way want to hold or contain,

they ritually kill you. Not physically, but they remove you from the life of the family. They remove you from the life of the synagogue. They will have a funeral service for you.

Alexander : They will sit shivah. They will put a monument out in the cemetery and a mother and a father will never see that child again. That son or daughter would never see their mother and father again. If they walked down the street and they see someone who looks like someone who was, they think of them as a ghost. So, this tragic moment and this ripping apart between Christianity and its mother tradition Judaism in the eighties of the first century is a wound that we carry still. And it's a wound that was deeply born by both sides and we still bear the marks of that wound.

Alexander : So, Luke's first emphasis in the texts that he composes, or is the revealed to him, is to remove any sense of bitterness and revenge and acrimony from Christians to their mother and father Judaism. Luke wants us to move forward as Christians and in no way forsake our Judaism, even though our mother tradition has told us we must leave. So, you're going to see in some ways that Luke's gospel is the most Jewish of them all. But there's a further aspect to this wounding and that further aspect is that once Judaism says we can no longer be part of them, we must now stand up before the Roman emperor as our own tradition. And the emperor is concerned about us on two accounts. First, we're passionate, we're zealous. We feel that we have this new, wider revelation and this new wider way of living and the emperor doesn't like passion.

Alexander : The emperor likes to keep everybody gray, and under his thumb, and under his rule. The emperor's number one concern is are you going to pay taxes, and are you going to observe Roman law, and the socioeconomic way that Rome has constructed its empire? Well, A, we as Christians at this point are not going to be gray. We're not going to be passionless. And secondly, and most grievously for the emperor, the way that we choose to live because of the life of Jesus the Christ makes us, in his eyes, an enemy. We choose through the awareness that the Christ has brought us, that all people are brothers and sisters, all people. This is not an understanding that the Roman emperor wants getting started in his empire because the Roman emperor quite likes to keep us squabbling against each other. The Roman emperor quite

likes for the Eastern provinces to not like so much the Western provinces and vice versa.

Alexander : The tension between groups in the empire allows his army to stay more at peace. Secondly, as Christians, we see the integrity, and the great worth, and the equality, the growing equality of women. Now, I can't say that at this point in Christianity that men and women are equal, but we're on the way. This is not an idea that the Roman emperor wants in his empire. Women are property.

Alexander : Third, we begin to speak to slaves and tell them that they're humans with souls worthy of respect. Again, we are nowhere near yet advocating the abolition of slavery, but just by the fact that we treat slaves with respect as a fellow human, this is not an idea that the emperor wants in his empire because to him slaves are worse. They're not even property. Basically in the Roman empire, the idea is that slaves are animals and they can be treated in any way that the emperor wishes to treat them.

Alexander : And lastly, we as Christians continue our mother tradition Judaism that we feel obligated to take care of those who are less than, those who are poor, those who are ill, those who are widowed, those who are outcast. And if you have wealth, you have an obligation through the life of the Christ to share that wealth with those who do not. And again, this value system is a direct affront to the emperor and to the Roman senators who are mini gods who can treat you in any way they wish to treat you. You are their subject and in no way their human equal.

Alexander : And those who have wealth in the Roman empire have no obligation whatsoever to share that with those who don't. So, for all of these reasons, the emperor becomes quite concerned about this new spiritual tradition that's living in a way that threatens the value system that he wants for the empire. And when he initially sets legal restrictions against us, we simply grow stronger. And so in the end, the emperor decides to do away with us. We are few, we are scattered, we have little financial resources, we don't have access to the leverages of power, and he believes that it will be a simple matter to dispose of us by literally killing us and eradicating this new belief the face of his empire.

Alexander : Sadly, he does not understand what Jesus the Christ taught that you try to do away with the truth of a human, and the stones will shout that truth. Truth, as Luke proclaims to us, can never be killed. It can be held back for awhile, but truth, and honor, and love, and compassion, and generosity, and reconciliation, and justice will always prevail. This is Luke's text to us. It's very much what Martin Luther King said when Martin Luther King said that the arc of the universe gently bends evermore towards justice.

Alexander : So, Luke, in his writing of this text, wants to give us the spiritual practices that will keep us moving the vision of the oneness and the vitality of Jesus the Christ and the life that that's awakened in us wants for us to integrate that into our ordinary, everyday living. Go back to the Jewish metaphor. Arriving at the promised land, it took them 200 years to make that promised land their everyday nation state. It took us Christians 250 years following the way, the four gospel journey, the way of Jesus the Christ before the Roman emperor fell. Not because of a physical battle, but because we had done the slow steady work of converting one heart, one heart, one heart. 250 years of being imprisoned. One heart, one heart. 250 years of being killed. One heart, one heart, one heart, one heart, one heart, one heart. Until we change the value system of the people of the Roman empire who would no longer stand for the corruption of the emperor.

Alexander : So, Luke's text, which we're going to turn to now, is a text about knowing truth always wins. Knowing as we hear often today, love always wins. And therefore when we know it because we know the journey, we don't feel obligated to win any battles. What we feel obligated to do is that each one of us feels the obligation in the small ways that we can every day to offer our gift, to offer our value system, and to touch a heart, and touch a heart, and touch a heart. The big stuff we leave to God, which is where it should be. The small stuff we're obligated to pick up every day. But I love, as Luke tells us, Luke gives us this beautiful phrase. He says, "Pick up your cross daily and follow me."

Alexander : I also take by that statement, at some point, lay the cross down. There's nothing wrong with joy, humor, love, feasting, celebrating. The joy of life is what will keep us on the long work ahead. Because Luke's metaphor for us is the long road that goes out to the horizon. There is no place on this road to stop. If you read Luke's text and the Acts of

the Apostles, you'll see that the disciples, that all the great teaching, and all the great miracle stories, and all of the great action in this gospel happens on the road between villages. And that's Luke's great teaching to us is the only question is how are you walking today? Who are you walking with? How are you serving right now? And tonight, or at some point, lay it down, rest, have fun. Be people of joy. This is God's work that you're about and the burden should rest on God's shoulders.

Alexander : So now, let's go back and I want to focus on the early stories of Luke's gospel. There is so much in the text, just like all the texts, but there are a couple of things in this text which are so important. And the first one is this story about the angel coming to Zechariah. Zechariah is a high priest. He's serving in the Holy of Holies that day. And the angel comes to announce to him that his wife, Elizabeth, is with child. And of course, Zechariah and Elizabeth are older. We don't really know quite how old, but they are generally considered to be beyond childbearing age. And because they are older and without child, they have been ... The tongues have been wagging. Because in those days to have a child and especially a boy child means that God blesses you. And if you have no child, it means that in some way you have sinned and your childlessness is the shame that you wear before your tribe.

Alexander : So, this news that Zechariah is going to have a child, and not only that, a son, and not only a son, a son that's going to have an important function, the salvation of Israel. Wow. This is for Zechariah, a third path experience. It has the numinous visionary energy of a third path experience. And then the text tells us that Zechariah begins to question the angel. And you might know the story that the angel Gabriel also comes to Mary, and also gives Mary a like announcement, and Mary also questions Gabriel. But Gabriel's response to Zechariah is quite different than Gabriel's response to Mary. And it took me a long time to sit with this text and meditate on it, and read all the hermeneutics in this, what the scholars have said about this text. But primarily again, to go back to the work of Joseph Campbell and understand this text is about the fourth path.

Alexander : That's the bottom line of how to understand the text in this metaphor. That these stories are here because they hold a practice, which is important to us on the fourth path. And on the fourth path, as we begin to go out to the world with the passionate zeal of the third path

revelation, understanding, awareness that's been awakened in us, we too need the angel Gabriel to say to us, "I am going to still your tongue until this event has already come to pass." Because the stilling of Zechariah's tongue is a physical muteness. Because what's absolutely essential for all of us at this point is to only talk to those closest to us, to talk to our counselor, our spiritual director, our pastor, but not to go out and begin talking to everybody about this gift. It's too soon and we don't yet know what it means.

Alexander : So, when what we're sharing is usually our pride, and our arrogance, and our ego blabbering away. So, it's right that Zechariah be mute. But the other type of muteness is if you really look at what Zechariah's question back to the angel is, Zechariah is trying to figure it all out. Zechariah is a typical father and a man. "My son is going to be an important son in the history of Israel, which you shivah. What school am I going to get him in? What's going to be our prayer practice at home? What's going to be our diet? How am I going to manage all of this? How am I going to give my son exactly the right schooling that he needs and the right training that he needs to make this promise happen?"

Alexander : Zechariah, you're being asked to care, but you're not being asked to figure it all out. Look at what Mary's response is. Mary's response is the better response on the fourth path. Mary takes the news to her heart and she ponders it, for Mary knows that if this is the promise of God, it will happen, and nothing on this planet, no power in this universe will stop it. And her role is not to figure it out or to manage it. Her role is to ponder it, and to do her small piece in bringing it to fruition.

Alexander : So, this great question, practice from right at the beginning of Luke is one of the most important ones for us on the fourth path about still our tongues and still our ego, minds trying to manage and figure it all out, and let God be God. And I want to go one step further here because to me, the most beautiful prayer in all of scripture is pouring out through the mouth and the heart of Mary here at the beginning of this gospel. And it's called the Song of Mary or the Canticle of Mary. It's a paean or praise that bursts from her as she meets her cousin Elizabeth.

Alexander : But let's remember how Luke opens his gospel because Luke is the text that tells us the historical days surrounding Jesus's conception and birth. But he's not giving us history for history's sake. When Luke tells us who is the emperor, and when Luke tells us who is the governor, and when Luke tells us who are the priests in the Temple, what Luke is saying to us is these are days of enormous pain, and tremendous suffering, and great injustice, and the injustice is so overwhelming no one could have expected a turnaround. The government and the Jewish priesthood is against the people. The people have no one to turn to but God. And many of them, at this moment, are feeling despairing of God's presence, feeling that there is no way that they could ever defeat and overturn the injustice of the Roman emperor.

Alexander : So, Luke gives us this incredible text for us today. You think things are bad today, you think things are irreversible today? I have a gospel for you. Luke. Luke who says it's precisely in this moment, it's precisely in this type of experience that the deep power of Jesus the Christ rises up again from the stones of the Earth and shouts, liberation, shouts justice, and love, and compassion, and reconciliation. Wait for it, believe it, know it. And this is Mary's canticle of praise because Mary does the most amazing thing ever in the text of her prayer. She prays the future as an event which has already happened. For she knows ... She doesn't hope and she doesn't even trust.

Alexander : There's something in Christianity, in the spiritual practice of Christianity, which is beyond hope and beyond trust. And it is knowing in the very cells of your body, God's promise. And knowing that in God's time, if each one of us, if enough of us will do our small piece of work that God has put on our heart to do, if enough of us do that, the turnaround is assured.

Alexander : And it is that reason that Luke so beautifully brings this prayer of Mary and gives it to us at the opening of this gospel of the fourth path, which is about the long, endless road of greater love, the long, endless road of wider justice, the long, endless road of deeper reconciliation. And that we are not obligated. In fact, we cannot ever get to the end of this road. Our obligation on the fourth path is to simply take one more step, and one more step, and one more step. And there'll be days when we stop and we pause, but there is no retirement from the fourth path. There's only a change of work. For

we are obligated to be the hands, and the eyes, and the ears, and the feet of our God.

Alexander : Each one of us offering the small gift that we have to offer so that all of those things that we dream and want to see happen will happen someday. May not be in our lifetime. The early Christians, 250 years, how many generations died trusting and knowing the promise, but never seeing the turnaround? And this is Luke's charge to us as we walked the fourth path to do the work, keeping our eyes on God, not keeping our eyes on the bottom line or looking for evidence that the turnaround is happening.

Alexander : Martin Luther King Jr. gave these words in the American South in the bleak days of the Civil Rights movement. I remember these words because as a seven-year-old, I stood outside of my grandmother's house that had been firebombed by the KKK. These words, to me, summarize the work of the fourth path and the text of the gospel of Luke. He said, "Send your hooded perpetrators." I.e. the KKK. "Send your hooded perpetrators into our neighborhoods at the midnight hour. Burn our homes, beat our children, break our bones, and we will not hate you. We won't. But we will win our freedom because we will so appeal to your heart and to your conscience by our ability to suffer, that when we win our freedom, we will win yours as well."

Alexander : Now, it's hard to argue with Martin Luther King, but I might suggest that perhaps to us today, that word suffering we might substitute. We will so appeal to your heart and to your conscience by our ability to love in the face of what others see as great suffering, that when we win our victory, when we win our freedom, the victory will be twofold, for we will have won yours as well.

Alexander : And so, in these days with the gospel of Luke ringing in our hearts, the challenge is there is no human person who is our enemy. We do not fight people. We fight the perspective of ignorance. We fight the acts of injustice. But we understand that every person on the planet, we understand that every grain of soil and sand in the cosmos is already our brother and sister. And we assume the great and noble work of the four gospel path for radical transformation, so that as we convert our hearts to be ones of deeper love, that that love is what will go forth and touch the hearts of others. Even those who we consider to be our adversary. I wish you well.

Alexander : Are we concerned that our lives will be too short for the task? That we will never see results? No, never. We now know with certainty that life is eternal and God's time is the only one worth marking. We have our greater purpose and it's very clear. We are focused on the noble work with which Christians were charged 2000 years ago and which hasn't changed. Follow the journey. Understand and know God. Follow the journey. Grow and live with God. Follow the journey. Pass it on and serve God, and do this with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and mind.

The Essential Practices of the Journey

Alexander: There are a few what I call core or essential practices, which power us, or hold the grace that powers us, along this Four-Gospel Journey for growth and transformation. And whether you engender these practices for yourself or with one other person or a small community. This is what makes this journey possible. When we go back and review the stories of Jesus and we bring that forward to today in this moment, what I believe is happening when we come into the reality of Jesus the Christ, is that we have come in to an experience of what I term deep freedom and safety.

Alexander: Freedom and safety are a two step because there is no such thing as absolute freedom nor is there such a thing as absolute safety. It is finding the balance point between these two for ourselves.

Alexander: Now what do I mean by freedom? When we come into the presence of Jesus the Christ, we come into a presence of love that is totally nonjudgmental. That in this presence of utter love and respect, it's the energy, the reality that makes us want to grow, that actually powers us in doing the work of growth. Not as a have to or a should, but because in the presence of Jesus the Christ, love calls to love. And when you look into the heart of love and you see yourself through that very heart, you want to be more. You want to be the authentic self that that love has created you to be.

Alexander: So on the Four-Gospel Journey, we begin by the practice of freedom. We begin by looking at ourselves through the eyes of love, with non-

judgment, accepting the beauty of who we are and accepting us in this moment exactly as we are now.

Alexander: The other side of that is the presence of safety. The presence of safety must be a boundaried experience. I'm always caught in myself remembering that utter freedom is a horror because freedom, true freedom requires safe boundaries. We are not free to simply do everything. We are not free to simply say everything, not when we look at ourselves with a heart of love. There must be a boundaried experience. And what I ask when we are making the Four-Gospel Journey is that we stay away from speaking to ourselves or to another sort of absolute and dogmatic statements. I am on this journey not to convert anyone else. I'm on this journey to discover the deep truth of my authenticity, but that authenticity is always a place where I act respectfully. I act respectfully towards myself. I act respectfully towards others. So the core practice as we move through the four pads is to come up against our own limitations of freedom and safety, come up against our own challenges and lessons, into how to be a person of great freedom and safety for myself and for others.

Alexander: Freedom and safety does not mean that this journey is without risk. Freedom and safety does not mean that this is without pain. Freedom and safety does that mean that this journey is without challenge. What freedom and safety means is that in times of great pain and stress, perhaps even conflict, we are going to act through the eyes of love with respect for ourselves and respect for all others.

Alexander: Now, the third practice, freedom and safety being the first two, the third practice is what I called welcoming the other. And I first learned about this practice really in my studies and being with peoples from the plains, indigenous peoples of the United States of the Americas. And they have a particular individual that they call the heyoka and the heyoka is someone who receives the vision in their adolescent vision quest that they are being called to this role, and the role is quite arduous. In fact, it is the most honored and the most arduous role of the entire people because the heyoka is called to in flesh in every way, not play acting, but to in flesh in every way being quote unquote, the other.

Alexander: Now this starts with their mannerisms and their dress. The heyoka is often going to wear heavy furs in the summer and they're going to go

half naked in the winter. The heyoka is going to learn to access the emotions that are opposite of what most of us are experiencing. For instance, the heyoka at a wedding is going to behave as if at a funeral and at a funeral is going to be humorous and joyful perhaps as a wedding. You'll often see the heyokas walking backward. You'll see the heyoka learning to be ambidextrous. Just they take on the physical and emotional characteristics which are opposite most of us, most of the people.

Alexander: And the most honored role of the heyoka is what they do for us when we are at council, when we are discerning, when the chief or the elder has called all of us together to be in discernment about some question that's facing us as a people. At this moment and especially as our voices may begin to move in one direction in that discussion, the heyoka from a place of inner truth and integrity must speak to the opposite. Not to be adversarial, but the indigenous peoples of the Americas know that unless every voice is heard and respected, we cannot make a good discernment. So the heyoka is speaking what we often are uncomfortable with. What we think is certainly can't be part of this discussion, in part of this discernment. The heyoka comes in and gives voice to that in a vociferous and passionate way to get us to consider wholeness rather than a linear one-sided decision.

Alexander: So I know that I have a heyoka voice inside of myself and it speaks back to the rest of me and it speaks different and conflicted and oppositional views. And what I've learned is that my spiritual work is not about cutting that voice off or demonizing that voice in any way, but welcoming it, pulling the chair up, giving it a place at the table. The heyoka knows that their opinion and their voice is not about winning an argument. That they offer their voice in selfless service for the wholeness of the people.

Alexander: So I'd like to invite you to welcome that opposite, the other voice inside of yourself, for your own growth, but especially to offer welcome and respect to that voice in your community, in your family. Understand that the other must be welcomed if we are on the path to spiritual wholeness. Freedom, safety, and welcoming the other are the core practices of the Four-Gospel Journey for growth and transformation.

Alexander: In my work and as we come through the fourth path, and I've already said a great deal about how critical the fourth path is to complete one cycle of the journey, that we cannot for our own wholeness and holiness stop at the third path. That we must take that vision and awareness of the third path and walk it into the integrative work and service work of the fourth path. And in the book, I named eight separate practices, which are an outflow of the fourth path. But in this short video, I want to name two.

Alexander: And the first is Speak Truth and Unity. And the next practice that I'll talk about just a moment is Absorb the Deeper Rhythms.

Alexander: So Speak Truth and Unity as a deep practice of the fourth path where we go out to the community and perhaps to the world with some wider awareness and practice that we want to help engender in our lives. And because we have this new awareness, we oftentimes have a deep conviction about it, perhaps passion and zeal about it, and well we should, but we need to remember that as we go to the world in service, that we live in a cosmos, which is already the Christ, and so therefore we do not fight people. We bring awareness to new ideas, to new concepts, to new experiences.

Alexander: So so often as I look around today and I hear people's speech, I hear people strongly advocating for their position, but then doing something which is detrimental to their position. They make the other person less than. They might even demonize the other person. Whether it's a friend, a family member, or a politician, or a public figure, that is not the work of the fourth path. The work of the fourth path is to speak truth, speak truth to power, but what Luke teaches us and what Jesus the Christ teaches us is, yes, we are going to speak truth to power, but we're going to speak truth to power in union and in love. I will never go to the place of looking at my adversary as a demon.

Alexander: Second practice, Absorb the Deeper Rhythms. Now there are two aspects to this and one is, in whatever way I'd like you to begin to be aware and to trust, and to know the cycle, and perhaps one of the best ways to begin to know that is to remind ourselves of the truth of the seasons. And that in this way of understanding growth and transformation, a new cycle always begins at the moment where the light, the radiance of the old cycle begins to dim. So therefore, I would like you to forget about calendars and dates on calendars and I'd like

you to return to the older understanding which almost every spiritual tradition and almost every indigenous people on the planet observe. Autumn is the beginning. Why autumn? Because that is the moment that the sun metaphorically begins to set on the seasons. And think about autumn and think about how autumn is the time that the year that's coming to a close, the growing cycle is coming to a close. The harvest is being brought in. We are celebrating the gifts of the harvest and immediately we're beginning to prepare ourselves for the new growing cycle.

Alexander: What follows autumn is winter where things seem to die, where seeds are deep in the earth, where trees are barren. Where perhaps you live in a climate where there's deep snow or light snow or frost, but in some way, the winter experience is a death like experience and yet, we know because of the cycle, that there's a tremendous amount of new life that is happening in the winter. It's just that we can't see it yet and perhaps we can't feel it yet. I used to go out in the winter time and closely look at trees and you can actually see on the barren branches, the buds forming for the springtime.

Alexander: And then following winter comes spring, when things leaf out, when things bud out, when there is perhaps a return to a great deal of color. Where there is a rush of adrenaline and emotion, and we remember that in the beauty of the spring that it's there, not for itself, but it's there for all the blossoms and buds to come to the fruition of summer where the fruit matures into harvest and the cycle starts again.

Alexander: Knowing that we are part of the law of the cosmos, our planet is part of the law of the cosmos and that the law of the cosmos is an expression of the Christ. The Christ is not any one point of the journey. The Christ is the wheel and the flow of the journey. And that the wheel and the flow of the spiritual journey in us is just as certain in its sequence as autumn to winter, winter to spring, spring to summer, and summer back to autumn.

Alexander: Now, perhaps you don't live in a place on the planet where the seasons are quite that distinct and dramatic. Another way to touch and absorb the deeper rhythm is the 24 cycle, the 24 hour cycle of the day. Remembering that late in the day as the sun begins to set, yeah, our civil culture tells us that the day is coming to an end, but when we understand the spiritual cycle, not the civil cycle, we now understand

that when the sun goes down, it's the beginning, and we go into the time of darkness and it gets darker. Perhaps it gets colder. That's the second path. The sun going down as the first path. Going into the night and letting it get darker and darker and darker and colder and colder and colder is the second path. And you actually know that it's coldest right before dawn. And that dawning experience is the third path. The beginning of the radiance which comes forth from the darkness and then that radiance feels the sky of day. And for most of us, we do our work until we come back to late afternoon, early evening as the sun goes down again and we start the new day.

Alexander: If there is one practice and experience that I would most invite you to begin with, it is this visceral feeling, sensory experience with your body and then your mind teaching yourself the arrival of darkness is the beginning. The revival of darkness is the beginning. Everything in our culture right now is giving us a different message. That's not the spiritual truth of our tradition. That's not the practice of the journey of the Christ. When the Christ brings us around to darkness, the Christ brings us to that place for our own new beginning.

Alexander: Speak truth and in unity. Absorb the deeper rhythms. Always remembering that in the cycle of growth and transformation, and our experience of the journey that we call the Christ, the arrival of darkness is the beginning moment of the new journey.