

THE ODYSSEY

a wandering and eventful journey with God

Partner's Letter

August 5, 2023

Dear Partner,

Ready, set, go! We're launching our 20th year of ministry, and it's a great time to update you on what's happening at Theodyssey. It's inspiring to be a part of it! First, a sincere thank you for praying for us and for your faithful financial support that makes all of this possible. Together with you, we are changing the world for Christ one human heart at a time.

Below is personal update about what's emerging here at Theodyssey. There's a lot of information that really matters. I thought you would want to know.

First, a word about life at the intersection of faith and culture. . .

I offer these comments both as a warning and encouragement for how we live in these times. Our culture presents endless challenges to navigate. Wokeism. War. Artificial Intelligence. Critical Race Theory. Immigration. Global Warming. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Starvation. Gender Identity. Biden and Trump. The list goes on and constantly changes.

I watch many Christ-followers wade into these issues and get swept away in confusion and disillusion. As you Biblically and thoughtfully consider the day's challenges, *be uncommonly cautious about the erosion of your eternal perspective*. There is nothing new under the sun, and what ultimately prevails is the wisdom of "folly."

²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

—I Corinthians 1:20-25

God has raised up Theodyssey for such a time as this. To painstakingly and compassionately disentangle people pinned under the rubble of cultural deconstruction, and help them recapture and embrace the dazzling glory of who they are in Christ Jesus. This is why Theodyssey exists.

THE ODYSSEY

a wandering and eventful journey with God

"As Theodyssey begins its 20th year, explain what it is today."

Here's an analogy: Imagine an Executive Coaching movement with over 6,000 clients in 17 states and 7 countries, 125 certified coaches, a full-time staff, a dedicated support team, a proprietary curriculum, online leadership training, podcasts, retreats, workshops, and leadership tools.

Now factor in a few key differences: Instead of Executive Coaching, the focus is Christian spiritual formation. And, there are no profit (we're a non-profit entity), no advertising budget (growth is 100% viral), no facilities (no rents, utilities, or taxes), and no corporate five-year plan (we're not building anything; we're simply cultivating what's growing).

The way of Jesus is the 'Upside Down Kingdom.' That's the Kingdom we care about most.

"What is your biggest caution for Theodyssey?"

Historically, organizations including education, business, religion, and government, begin with a **Man or Woman** with a vision. This evolves into a **Movement** of people who work together for new possibilities. Inevitably, growth leads to building a **Machine** where responsibilities are compartmentalized, administrators hired, and the DNA that once fueled organic growth migrates to the corporate suites. This evolution inevitably results in a **Monument** focused on maintaining structures, processes, and traditions which have become more important than the original vision.

Although often teased and tempted by the allure and advantages of becoming a Machine, we fight hard to maintain a Movement. We don't mind looking 'backwards,' or naïve, or unsophisticated about marketing, advertising, ROI, or analytics. We actually get it; we just don't want it.

My greatest caution: That Theodyssey never becomes a Machine.

"What's emerging at Theodyssey? Where are we headed?"

1. PRIORITY OF NEXT GENERATION MINISTRY

In case you blinked, the world just changed. The 25-35-somethings we reached when we first started are now plus or minus 50 years of age. The culture—language, music, politics, art, philosophy, relationships, etc.—has radically shifted. **Eric Lehman**, our Ministry Pioneer, is working to assemble a small community of 20-somethings to tease out the answers to a question we're always asking: *How do we help the next generation explore their spiritual lives?*

There's nothing easy here. But the answers will come with the asking. We're seeking to understand how to incarnate the Gospel to this new generation, and create ministry contexts and tools where faith can grow. For the sake of Jesus, we want to win with this generation.

Pray for Eric and the conversation with this emerging community, as they explore the possibilities. We'll keep you updated.

THEODYSSEY

a wandering and eventful journey with God

2. TYRANNUS HALL: Our new leadership development academy

About AD 55, the Apostle Paul returns to the bustling city of Ephesus. When his efforts to teach in the synagogue are rebuffed, Paul rents a hall from Tyrannus, where he teaches and disciples others in Christ. Tyrannus Hall was part of a movement to raise up transformational Christ-followers during a key moment in history, perhaps much like today.

One of our top priorities is raising up the next generation Christian leaders. This is imperative. When you give to Theodyssey, you make this critical work possible. We devote significant time and resources to create accessible, online leadership training modules, tied to in-person coaching.

Here's what Tyrannus Hall has for you right now! Consider the possibilities and sign up.

SMALL GROUP LEADERS CERTIFICATE (9 months)

For those who want to learn to lead a group. Starts with an online bootcamp at the end of August, followed by quarterly workshops, and personal mentoring. Register at:

theodyssey.org

SPIRITUAL FORMATION LEADERSHIP CERTIFICATE (2 years)

For Theodyssey alumni/ae desiring advanced skills in spiritual direction and formation for the purpose of leading others. Online modules, cohorts, coaching retreats, and mentors.

Four 6-week modules offered over the course of two-years. Take them in any order, over whatever period of time that works for you.

- Teaching to the Gaps* (Socratic small group leadership)
- Spiritual Listening* (helping others notice key interior facts)
- Self-Knowledge Intensive* (includes testing and feedback)
- The Trellis* (cultivating the Christian life)

This fall: *Spiritual Listening*

Starts in September. Explore the possibilities at: theodyssey.org

And in the future, we hope to offer a **growing menu** of retreats, workshops, and podcasts to equip and empower a new generation of Christ-followers.

3. WE'RE BUILDING THE PLATFORM FOR A THRIVING MINISTRY TEAM

We recognize that God uses highly trained, gifted, and committed leaders to help bring about His possibilities in this world. We want our leaders to thrive and to be here long term. Accordingly, the board has approved a moderate salary adjustment for our ministry staff to bring them closer in alignment with a living wage.

THE ODYSSEY

a wandering and eventful journey with God

In addition, our budget for the 2023-2024 year (Aug-July) includes, for the first time, a shared health insurance benefit for employees.

These are simple but major next steps in establishing a ministry platform that will endure.

4. ADDING STRATEGIC MINISTRY STAFF

In an organic, decentralized organization like Theodyssey (think: AA), a ministry team of five could potentially facilitate ministry to 100,000 people. See: *Book of Acts*.

(Note: We don't chase numbers—we simply cultivate what God is growing. Additionally, one of our highest values is “hiddenness” rather than self-promotion. So the number above simply highlights the *potential capacity* of a collaborative team of five. If it seems like I'm touchy about these values, I am.)

A leadership team of five would align around their different gifts, experience, training, and passions. It might look something like this:

- 1-Vision, Leadership, Resource Development
- 2-Ministry Pioneering and Networking
- 3- Operations and Systems Designer
- 4-Leadership Training
- 5-Communication and Storytelling

This is fun: **We just hired #4.**

The Board of Directors recently approved hiring **Ruth Peterson** to be the Director of Tyrannus Hall, our leadership development academy, to help equip the next generation of Christian spiritual formation leaders. She starts September 1st in a part-time role.

Ruth worked as the COO at a private investment company and has vast experience in leadership and management. She has a deeply rooted passion for Scripture and an equally committed heart to serve others. Ruth and her husband Glen live in Los Gatos, CA and have three adult children.



THE ODYSSEY

a wandering and eventful journey with God

5. MEET OUR NEW DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS



Tamara Eropkin switched seats from being our Storyteller to become our new Director of Operations. Tamara replaces **Tom Peterson**, who pioneered the policies, procedures, and culture that define our operations today. She is also assuming the responsibilities of **Paul Lindstrom**, our Technical Director, as we combine job descriptions. Nothing but the highest praise for the job Paul has done for us.

Tamara is a highly skilled, experienced, and innovative leader who will play a significant role in leading us into tomorrow. We are beyond fortunate to have her on our team!

This year, Tamara, her husband Evan, and their son Alek live in. . . we'll let her explain it to you. It's pretty cool!

6. WELCOMING A NEW GENERATION OF BOARD MEMBERS

Following a season of interviews and discernment, our Board of Directors unanimously approved two new directors, effective August 1st.

Matt Yost is a fire department Chief with nearly 30 years of experience in leadership and group dynamics. He oversees emergency operations and communications. Matt and his wife Janet live in San Jose, CA and have two adult children.



Rachael Brown is a professional healthcare provider, an occasional college instructor, and a published author in the nutrition and wellness space. She is passionate about helping others turn head knowledge into practical and meaningful life change. Rachael and her husband Zach live in Scotts Valley, CA, and have two kids away at college.



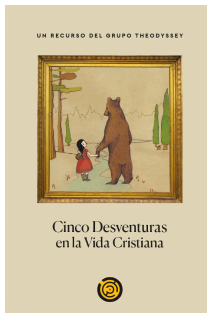
Matt and Rachael join existing board members: **Ben Slick** (Chairman), **Robert Nielsen** (Secretary), **Lisa Olson**, **James Williams**, **Ruth Peterson**, and me. This is a seasoned, spiritually wise group of Christ-followers dedicated to navigating the road ahead.

7. JOINING GOD WHERE HE IS AT WORK: A SPANISH TRANSLATION

The Spanish version of the Theodyssey small group study, *Five Misadventures in the Christian Life*, will be available in our online store by mid-August. This translation is the brainchild of **Gilberto Urbina**, one of our San Diego leaders, along with a team of co-translators he recruited from family and friends.

THEODYSSEY

a wandering and eventful journey with God



Gilberto shared the need with **Eric**, our Ministry Pioneer, who helped create a pathway to printing. It reminds me of Henry Blackaby's quote: "Find out where God is at work and join Him there." This is a good example of that.

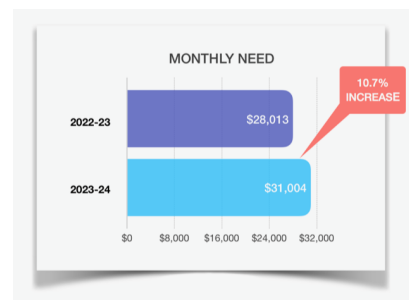
Special thanks to **Kristin Jensen**, who did the content layout and her husband **Brian Jensen**, who designed the original cover. Indeed, it does 'take a village.' I celebrate the 'village' we all belong to.

About finances, or more accurately, "provision". . .

First, let's all acknowledge God's unwavering provision for the work of this ministry. Through His grace and the collective effort of partners around the country, **we recently completed our 2022-2023 fiscal year with a positive balance** (a financial report next month). Thank you for the part you played in making this happen.

We're gearing up for our 20th consecutive year, pursuing those longing for the reality of Christ but might not even know it. They're young professionals, artists, soldiers, teachers, engineers, new parents, nurses, and even pastors who are confused, disillusioned, or worse regarding God. Stir in the divisive issues of our day and they're fully stuck. Most have given up on "church." They recognize the hypocrisy of "new life in Christ" heralded by a community of the untransformed. So where do they turn?

Again, Theodyssey is for such a time as this, where conversations in authentic communities provide safe zones to express and unpack 'what is' and explore what 'can be' in Christ. It's messy, often raw, and always real. But in the midst of it, Jesus frequently does something akin to the time He MacGyvered a meal for 5,000 from a few crusts of bread and two fish: He does a miracle. He transforms the human heart through love.



As the board and staff considered what we have explored here, we felt compelled to respond in faith. We lean into this next fiscal year with **a budget of almost \$3,000 more a month**. I know. Ridiculous. We have cut all non-essential expenses to focus on new ministry opportunities. Our only hope is the faithfulness of God expressed through the generosity of partners like you. In reality, that's the only hope we've ever had. I pray that you join us chasing God's possibilities here. We'll get there as we travel and trust. . . *together*.

David Smith
Lead Navigator