



a publication of kirk irwin and sarah kennedy irwin in ministry with Cru and partnering with Friday Arts Project

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A Better Understanding

TAKING THE TEMPERATURE

In our ministry of reaching the Art world and artists it is not unusual to get questions about the effectiveness and value of the work we do. I (Kirk) have been doing this now for about two decades and this is neither a new question nor an illegitimate one. Sarah and I ask ourselves this question all the time because we want to make sure we are following the path God has for us. In this series of upcoming newsletters we want to attempt, in some small way, to answer that question in hopes of inviting you to a better understanding of why we do what we do. In addition to these newsletters, we are going to try to post some short videos (3-5 minutes) on our website engaging these thoughts with more information. When those are ready we will let you know.

Let me say from the beginning, it is our desire to see people, any person—whether in the arts or not—to come to know Jesus of Nazareth the way we do. As Paul stated before Agrippa in Acts 26, “Whether short or long (in time), I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am - except for these chains.” We too wish this for our unbelieving neighbors and friends.

If I was able to talk to all of you individually, I would wager that we all agree that our culture has changed over the last few decades. This change—including a drifting away from understanding basic Judeo-Christian values—appears to have happened quickly, though I would argue it has happened over an extended period of time.*

The methods and tools long used don’t appear to be as effective as they once were. It isn’t that the information anyone needs to know about Jesus of Nazareth isn’t out there—it is out there *in spades*. So why is it that even with more information there is less response, at least here in the US and the traditional Western countries? As the Barna/Alpha study, “Reviving Evangelism” states, “Previous generations saw enormous success with relatively monolithic evangelism strategies such as mass campaigns, widespread adoption of ‘lifestyle evangelism’ and small ‘seeker sensitive’ evangelistic Bible Studies. While these approaches may still be effective in some contexts, the world today is different from decades past and ‘results may vary’...there is no longer a single recipe for what predictably compels non-Christians to give the gospel their true consideration.”

When I lived in New York, my pastor would have people say to him, “...it must be difficult to get into spiritual conversations in the city.” He said it wasn’t difficult at all to talk about significant and spiritual things in New York City, but what was difficult was getting people to decide about these things. Why? They were deluged with the variety of ideas and cultures in the urban setting. I think this has bled into the rest of society.

Here are a few examples in our own community in Rock Hill. “Bob” (not their real name) who lives down the street has been a fixture at our events for years. We recently had a significant interaction with him on our porch about truths found in Scripture, but it didn’t appear as though there was a response. “Jerry” whom we know from our events, expresses consistent hostility toward Christians on social media—to some, I have even responded. But when we tell him he is talking about us and our fellow staff he says we’re “not like that”. And then there is “Allie”, who trusted Christ last year, but has struggled with identity issues and has recently decided she is “non-binary” or “enby”. We still interact with her from time to time but have noticed she has drifted away since Covid-19 hit. All these people and more we often see and interact, but any progress is intertwined with popular lies they believe within our current culture.

So if the evangelistic methods of the past that were used to help people trust Jesus are less effective (and less acceptable*) today than in decades past, **how did we get here and what do we do now?** I will begin our next newsletter with this question. ■

Blessings—

Seven in 10 say they are not “on a quest for spiritual truth” (71%).
 Three-quarters of lapsed Christians (76%) and two-thirds of “nones” (67%) say so. However, about half of non-Christians who belong to another religion think of themselves as on a spiritual quest (46%).

Nearly half of Millennial practicing Christians say it is wrong to evangelize (47%).
 In fact, they are more likely than non-Christians (20%) and lapsed Christians (17%) to *strongly* agree that “it is wrong to share one’s personal beliefs with someone of a different faith in hopes that they will one day share the same faith” (28%).

*Statistics from the pages of the 2019 Barna Report—**Reviving Evangelism**.

- ★ For more information about us and our ministry, visit our website: www.birdandkey.com also check out Friday Arts Project on Facebook or website: www.fridayartsproject.org
- ★ If you would like to partner with us in ministry, visit our giving page on Cru’s website: www.cru.org/0402593

Kirk Irwin & Sarah Kennedy Irwin
birdandkey@gmail.com
k (646) 261-2847
s (321) 287-4507