



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

WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

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.

In our August 2020 newsletter, we started addressing the question about the effectiveness of a ministry in the arts. I ended the letter by posing the question of how did we even get to this moment in history where it seems the response to the Gospel has been increasingly low, and how do we address that?

The first question of how we got here would take more space and time than I am able to take. Suffice it to say, that I don't think it was one thing, it would be foolish to think so. Many blame the Church, and there is merit to this conclusion, but of late I am not as convinced. I certainly think the Church can share blame, just a quick reading of the Old Testament shows how God's "Chosen People", Israel lagged in "being a blessing" as God first commanded to Abraham in Genesis 12. But I emphasize *share* in the blame here. I think it is easy for people, especially Christians, to blame the Church exclusively for our problems, maybe too easy.

As I was thinking on these things, my mind recently wandered into the realization that God sent Jonah to Nineveh, not Jerusalem. Similarly, Abraham begged God's mercy for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, not for Bethlehem and Nazareth. The World shares as much blame for sin as does the Church. We are all Fallen together. Blame the Church? Sure, but don't let the World off the hook; it can be a darker place than even the Church.

What do we do? The first thing is to remind ourselves of the Gospel. Jesus—the Son of God—lived the perfect life, died the atoning death, and rose again from the dead to defeat death. And now anyone who believes this gets this same life in Him. Secondly, think about people's interaction with the Gospel dimensionally—on two different axes—picture an "x" and "y" diagram. The "y" axis is the knowledge someone needs to have as they engage the Gospel—the lower they are on the axis the less is their knowledge, the higher on the axis the more their knowledge. The "x" axis is a person's attitude toward the Gospel—the further left on the axis they are, the more "closed" off they are, the further to the right, the more "open" they are to the Gospel.* People exist all along the coordinates of this diagram. Some people are closed to the Gospel but have a lot of knowledge about it. Others are very open to the Gospel but have little to no knowledge.

How you interact with your neighbors and friends is influenced by where they are on the axis. Someone who likes their Christian neighbors and isn't hostile to the Church, but has little knowledge of Jesus obviously needs more information about Jesus of Nazareth. A person who is closed to the Gospel and Christians but has lots of knowledge about the Bible, etc needs less information, more prayer, and consistent relational connection with believers. As a person gains more knowledge and their attitude becomes more open, they naturally get closer to actually becoming a follower of Christ.

Our work in the Art world places us where we have relationships with many people who are closed to the Gospel—either hostile or not interested—and some of those people have little or (worse) mistaken knowledge about the Gospel. In my lifetime, the Art world has not been especially receptive to Christianity, which is why we have chosen this space; however, being in "the South" also places us where there are many people with knowledge about the Gospel.

Where would our audience be on this diagram? Well, all over the place—though we do have more people closed than open to the Gospel in our lives, rather normal for the Art world. Sarah and I have wondered how the last year of the Corona Virus and quarantining will impact where people are on the "Gray Matrix". This is why our consistent prayer for people as we approach our publicly held events is that God would allow us to be a part of someone's next step toward Him—from no knowledge to more, from being closed to open.

*This diagram is called "The Gray Matrix"—found at thegraymatrix.org. I will talk further about this diagram in a subsequent video at birdandkey.com. ■

Blessings—

Please Pray

- » Sarah's best friend (Audrey Butler) has been diagnosed with cancer again. If you'd like to follow along with her, here is her Caring Bridge Journal page: <https://www.caringbridge.org/visit/audreybutler/journal>
- » Sarah's mom had a stroke in January. Thankfully, she was able to get to the hospital in time for treatment, so her recovery has been going very well. Please pray that she will continue to improve.
- » Both Kirk & I caught Covid—thankfully, the symptoms weren't that severe. We're at the end of it now, but please pray that we can get caught up with work.
- ★ 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

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