

Preface

What are the spiritual thought patterns of our listeners?

Over the summer in Finney's Fast Five, we compared Christian radio listeners with Christians nationwide on beliefs and faith attitudes. Using Barna Research's nationwide survey results on Beliefs, Faith and Cultural Attitudes, we asked the same questions Barna asked of Christian radio listeners in multiple markets across the US to see if their beliefs are similar to or different from Christians nationwide.

We found some encouraging, some enlightening—and some would say troubling—trends among our listeners. In this compilation, you'll discover what makes up those currents of thought and action.

So please read on for what we think is our big communication challenge, and very importantly, what we as Christian communicators can do about it.

Let's wrestle and pray about the important thing in our work—how we can communicate clearly to help our listener move closer to Jesus.



June: Christian Radio Listeners Perceptions of Moral Truth

We asked Christian radio listeners across the US about their perceptions of Moral Truth. Is it absolute, relative or have you never thought about it? Here are their responses, compared to Christians nationwide as surveyed by Barna.

	Christian Radio Listeners	Christians Nationwide*
Moral truth is absolute	75%	59%
Moral truth is relative	13%	28%
Never thought about it	13%	14%

We've all heard that the moral fabric of our world is fraying. What was accepted as true 50 years ago cannot be assumed among people in 2017.

From Barna Research: "Christian morality is being ushered out of our social structures and off the cultural main stage, leaving a vacuum in its place – and broader culture is trying to fill the void. There is growing concern about the moral condition of the nation, even as many US adults admit they are uncertain about how to determine right from wrong."

So here's what we wondered. If Christians nationwide are "squishy" in their theology, how are Christian radio listeners different? And how do we need to change what we do to better communicate the Truth to current listeners to our radio stations or programs or to prospective listeners? This edition of *Finney's Fast Five* is the first in a series examining these questions.

Our first question is about Moral Truth. As you can see in the table above, Christian radio listeners agree that they believe that "Moral Truth is absolute" in higher numbers than Christians nationwide. About 75% either Completely Agree or Somewhat Agree.

But that leaves 25% of your listeners who believe either "Moral Truth is relative" or "Never Thought About It".

Moral Truth is *absolute*. But a quarter of your listeners don't agree.

And the question is **what do we do if what we're hoping for is more hearts, more deeply?**

"Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us." 1 Peter 2:11-12

Coming in Finney's Fast Five for July: we continue our series on Christian radio listeners' beliefs with a series of Agree/Disagree statements like "The highest goal of life is to enjoy it as much as possible." The answers are again sobering . . . or encouraging . . . depending on your perspective.

*Barna Survey of "Practicing Christians" nationwide 2015
[Barna Trends 2017](#), p. 50



July: Focus on Moral Truth, Part II

In July, we were focused on beliefs about Truth. Using the statements below, we asked Christian radio listeners if they Agree or Disagree with these statements. The percentages are the Total of “Completely Agree” and Somewhat Agree.”

	Christian Radio Listeners	Christians Nationwide*
The Bible provides us with moral truths that are the same for all people in all situations, without exception	94%	83%
Every culture must determine what is acceptable morality for its people.	28%	47%
Whichever is right for your life or works best for you is the only truth you can know.	16%	41%

The first two statements *contradict* one another. Yet, many Christians nationwide agreed with both statements! Christian radio listeners are closer to agreeing with one or the other, but even many of them *agree with both statements*. Even the third statement, a statement that truth is totally relative to the individual’s life experience has significant agreement, especially among Christians nationwide.

Notice how the main difference between the first two statements is that “Bible” is in the first and not in the second. We’re talking to an audience, and potential audience, whose beliefs have been effected by the world to a point that they have not internalized what they learned at church, *unless we supply them with the right Biblical answer*.

Because so much of life – with the exception of church, Bible study, a strong Christian family and your Christian radio station – doesn’t hand them the right Biblical option, we have a communication challenge. To quote a friend in Christian radio, “we have to kill the assumptions”. We can’t assume that our listener believes that morality is the same for all cultures. 28% of listeners and almost half of Christians, listener or non-listener, believe morality changes over time.

Our goal is helping you point your listener toward taking a step in His direction today. We urge you to discuss with your team what that means for how you communicate the Truth.



August: Main Life Goal/Life Fulfillment

In August, we were focused on Main Life Goal/Life Fulfillment. Using the statements below, we asked Christian radio listeners if they Agree or Disagree with these statements. The percentages are the sum of “Completely Agree” and “Somewhat Agree”.

	Christian Radio Listeners	Christians Nationwide*
The highest goal in life is to enjoy it as much as possible.	41%	67%
To be fulfilled in life, you should pursue the things you desire most.	49%	72%

Wow. A smack-in-the-face heaping helping of 2017 reality! Truth = The main purpose of life is to bring glory to God. Our churches and our Spoken Word content teach it. Our songs sing it. Our announcers reflect it. And, yet, two thirds of Christians nationwide believe that “the highest goal of life is to enjoy it”. Four in ten Christian radio listeners agree with that statement. The percentages of agreement are even higher when the same idea is phrased as “To be fulfilled in life, you should pursue the things you desire most.”

We must teach/sing/reflect/proclaim the Truth. If we’re going to do so effectively, we can’t presume the listener’s understanding of Truth. When about half of our current listeners, and two thirds of our potential listeners, agree with statements like this, we risk a communication gap. And in our short-attention-span-theatre, I-have-two-hundred-channels-and-will-leave-if-you’re-not-connecting-with-me-right-now world, if there is a gap, she will likely check out mentally/emotionally or leave.

An example: As heard on from a major radio preacher recently: “we need to read fewer books about the Bible and more of the Bible”. His words are true – we should read the Bible more. But his words assume your listener is reading *anything* from or about the Bible. If she isn’t (and she likely is not), his words could sound to her condescending, judgmental and out of touch.

If his goal is more Bible reading, what if it sounded more like assuming the reality of little Bible reading? “Would you try a ten day experiment with me? Ten minutes, ten verses, for ten days. I know you’re busy, but for the next 10 days, could you commit to reading your bible in a quiet place for 10 minutes? Read or listen to ten verses each day from the book of John. Begin on Day 1 with John Chapter 1, verses 1 through 10. Then on Day 2, same Chapter, verses 11 through 20. And then ask yourself after ten days . . . Am I closer to God? Have I grown spiritually? I believe you’ll be amazed.”

Here’s the thing. No one who is currently reading the Word will object. And those who aren’t are more likely to give it a shot.

*BarnaTrends 2017, p.53



September: Cultural Attitudes vs. Biblical Belief in Listeners

In September, we were focused on Cultural Attitudes. Using the statements below, we asked Christian radio listeners if they Agree or Disagree with these statements. The percentages are the Total of “Completely Agree” and “Somewhat Agree”.

	Christian Radio Listeners	Christians Nation Wide*
Any kind of sexual expression between two consenting adults is acceptable.	27%	40%
The best way to find yourself is by looking within yourself	60%	76%
People can believe whatever they want, as long as those beliefs don't affect society	34%	61%
People should not criticize someone else's life choices	66%	76%

The “Christian Radio Listener” numbers are people who listen to Christian radio regularly. The “Christians Nationwide” numbers are people who say they are Christian. In both cases, their beliefs often do not line up with what we preach, say or sing with the lyrics of our songs:

*“Your will above all else. My purpose remains. The art of **losing myself**. In bringing you praise.”***

*“Lord, I come, I confess. Bowing here I find my rest. **Without you I fall apart**. You're the one that guides my heart.”****

Barna President David Kinnaman and Q Founder Gabe Lyons observe: “Millions of Christians have grafted New Age dogma onto their spiritual person. When we peel back the layers, we find that many Christians are using the way of Jesus to pursue the way of self . . . While we wring our hands about secularism spreading through culture, a majority of churchgoing Christians have embraced corrupt, me-centered theology.”****

Here's our communication challenge: we cannot assume Biblical belief among our listeners.

Should we change the Gospel message? Definitely not.

Should we grapple with who we hope to talk to/play songs for and how we can reach them right where they are? And should we wrestle with how we can help them – more hearts, more deeply – to lean in, listen and take a step in Jesus' direction? We believe so.

*BarnaTrends 2017, p.53

**From The Inside Out/Hillsong United lyrics

***Lord, I Need You/Matt Maher lyrics

****Kinnaman/Lyons – Good Faith

