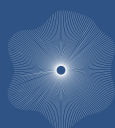# THE CHURCH CREATIVE DEPARTMENT

how to lead and serve your church
through videography, social media,
graphic design, and more

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INTRODUCTION

learning to play the guitar

Have you ever tried to play the guitar? I'm not much of a musician, personally. I learned a few chords back in college—trying to impress a girl, of course. (It didn't work, of course.) But I didn't get much further than the easy ones. G, C, Em, D. Wash, rinse, repeat.

If you're a truly disciplined person, you might learn to play the guitar by mastering the basics. You learn all of the notes, you memorize the scales. But more people want to learn music *by playing music*. They still have to cover the basics, but their inspiration—what gets them going—is a song.

While we were working on this project, we gave it the nickname "Project Wonderwall." You know, like the famous Oasis song:

> *Today is gonna be the day that they're gonna throw it back to you*
> *By now, you should've somehow realised what you gotta do*
> *I don't believe that anybody feels the way I do about you now*

Ah, the '90s.

A lot of people learned guitar so they could play "Wonderwall." That's a great start. But it's only a start. Learning to play "Wonderwall" should lead you to learn the next song, then the next, then the next. Why? Because your goal isn't to play "Wonderwall." It's to play the guitar.

Introduction
Learning to Play the Guitar

What you'll find in the rest of this guide is, in one sense, teaching you how we "play Wonderwall" for the creative department of our church. Rather than teach you *everything* there is to know about video editing, graphic design, AI writing, or social media, we want to show you how we approach each of those topics. It's just one song: We're explaining the basics of our craft by showing our work and explaining how we got there.

Each chapter comes from one of our staff members, distilling down a core piece of their job into a few pages. They offer advice and best practice for their area of expertise. But just as important, they provide examples.

Our goal isn't to have you copy what we do down to the letter, any more than a guitarist would be content to learn "Wonderwall" and then stop learning. Our goal is to teach you our "Wonderwall" in such a way that sets you up for your next song, whatever it may be. Pick up what you find helpful, leave behind what isn't, and contextualize all of it for your unique context.

For instance, if you aren't hiring any new teammates right now, you can skip that chapter. Or if you only have a budget of $250 for video gear, you'll have to be very selective with that chapter. Or if you're already rocking and rolling with your social media approach, you may decide not to listen to what we have to say about that. No worries.

Don't be overwhelmed by all of the advice we've given you here. Don't try to be just like us. But do try to learn from us. And remember: What you do is beautiful and important, whether you have a team of 50 people or an entire church of that same size.

We wish you a fruitful journey, even if all the roads you have to walk are winding. So from our team to yours: Enjoy!
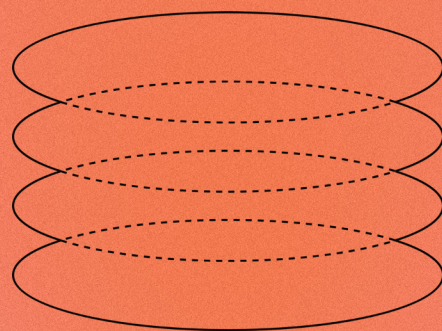
STEALING FOR JESUS

what smaller churches can borrow from larger churches—and what they can't

The saying goes, "Good artists copy and great artists steal." The phrase, often attributed to Steve Jobs, has (perhaps ironically) been stolen by myriad aspiring thought leaders over the decades.

The origin of the phrase is a 1919 essay in which poet T.S. Eliot discusses the work of the seventeenth-century English dramatist Philip Massinger.

Eliot wrote:

> One of the surest of tests is the way in which a poet borrows. Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different. [1]

Eliot isn't encouraging creatives to plagiarize or infringe on another artist's copyright. The idea is that a mature creative can draw inspiration from a variety of sources, and then deftly apply what she has gleaned to her own context.

Eliot continues:

> The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different from that from which it was torn; the bad poet throws it into something which has no cohesion. A good poet

[1] T.S. Eliot, "Philip Massinger," in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1920), 125.

2 Ibid.

will usually borrow from authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest. [2]

In the church world, there is no shortage of great "poets" from whom one can borrow. (The fact that you're reading this book would suggest that you understand the value of learning from others.) In fact, whenever our team starts a new creative project, one of the early steps in our process is to see how *other* churches have approached similar problems.

The question, then, isn't whether or not you borrow from others; it's *how* you borrow from others.

In this chapter, we're going to look at what it looks like to steal for Jesus. We'll explore what you can borrow from a larger church, what you probably shouldn't, and how to adapt what you've learned in your own unique way.

But first, let me explain how I learned these lessons.

Big Church, Small Church

I joined The Summit Church staff as a pastoral apprentice in 2016. Since then, I've worn many hats—web developer, marketing director, designer, animator, and photographer. Today, I help lead and support our creative team, an incredibly talented group of designers, videographers, content creators, and wordsmiths.

While it's a privilege to serve at a large church where I have the resources and the flexibility to explore new things and make cool stuff, I haven't always been in this position.

When God saved me at the Summit 14 years ago, he gave me a de-

sire to learn and teach his Word and to plant a church. A couple of years later, he called me to the mountains of North Carolina, where I served bivocationally on the pastoral team for a tiny church plant in rural Appalachia. When I say "bivocationally," what I really mean is that I brought home a paycheck from my day job and then volunteered an additional 10 or 20 hours of my time every week to serve at my church—everything from preaching and leading worship to sweeping the floors and stacking chairs.

Because I didn't grow up in church, I had no frame of reference for what church should look like other than what I had experienced at the Summit. To me, "normal" looked like three or four thousand people attending services each weekend. So as you can imagine, it was a bit of a culture shock when I walked into a church plant that gathered in an elementary school auditorium and had around 15 people in the seats on a good day. The small group that I had attended at the Summit was bigger than our entire congregation.

During that time, one of my principal contributions was to help with communications. I owned a marketing agency at the time, and I had a background in web development and social media management. But I'd never done any of that for a church before.

I found myself turning to larger churches, such as the Summit or Elevation Church, for inspiration. I'd check out what they were doing and I'd try to recreate it in my much smaller church. Some things worked really well. For instance, I was creating some great content for our social media channels, our website ranked number one in Google results for churches in our area, and we got a lot of new visitors who said they found us online. Our members and prospective guests loved listening to our sermon podcast when they were traveling or snowed in.

But other things didn't work out so well. In fact, there were some things that I tried to do—such as producing video content from scratch, live

streaming our services, or posting two to three times a day on social media—that didn't seem to accomplish much beyond stressing me out and making me wonder if I was really cut out for my job.

Through both of these experiences—serving in a very small church and a very large church—I've gained a perspective that has not only made me more effective in my role here at the Summit, but has also proven helpful as I consult with churches all over the country on their digital strategy.

What I share with you here is what I know *now* that I wish I knew when I was running communications *then*.

This is for those of you who are at small- to mid-sized churches and feel overwhelmed with everything that you have to do. You're looking for a glimpse of hope, maybe for some encouragement, and certainly for some direction.

So let's get to it. We'll examine five things that a small church can learn from larger churches, and (just as importantly) three things that you can't.

Steal These Things

Let's start off with what you *should* borrow from other churches.

1. A Plan
The first thing that your church can learn from other churches is a plan. Ben Franklin allegedly once said, "If you fail to plan, you're planning to fail." Every church that is successful on social media or digital platforms has a plan.

Your plan likely won't look like ours, but whether you're a church of 25 or 25,000, you need to have some sort of documented plan for your creative team. This could include what sort of creative pieces you'll produce for a new sermon series, how you'll approach communication channels such as social media or email, or what the process for requesting a new project should look like.

In practice, our plan relies heavily on three tools: (1) our social media strategy, (2) our social media policy, and (3) our content calendar. We use each of these every day.

First, **the social media strategy:** Your social media strategy is a brief document which could be (actually, should be) less than a page, outlining what your goals are for digital communication and how you plan to meet those goals. (We'll talk more about church marketing later in this book. Sit tight.)

Second, **the social media policy:** Our policy outlines what our team should and should not do on social media. It also guides us in how to respond to people when they engage with our content, either positively or negatively.

Third, the **content calendar:** While the first two documents are relatively static, the content calendar is much more fluid. Our social media manager, Tally, lives by her content calendar—it starts with placeholders for what types of content she's going to create from week to week. For instance, Monday's a sermon recap, while Tuesday's a volunteer spotlight. On weekends, she'll post an invitation to join us for a service. The content calendar ensures that she's not reinventing the wheel every week when she sits down to schedule her posts. She's halfway there before she even starts—and then she can fill in with some more timely posts for what's happening at our church this week.

If you don't have a content calendar, make one now. Pick a theme for each day of the week and plug it into a spreadsheet. If you need ideas, steal from some churches who you look up to and respect.

2. A Team

The second thing that you can take away from a large church is a team. Not literally stealing their team from them—but learning how to build a team like they have.

I'm blessed to be part of a team of talented church communicators who are way smarter than me in their areas of expertise. Whether that's video production or web development or graphic design or copywriting or project management, I'm able to do my job better because of them. But let's be real—most churches don't have that luxury. You've probably attended conferences or read books like this one and thought, "It would be great if I had 10 more people to help me do all of those things." Well, here's where I want to encourage you. Anyone can build a team.

When I started out with our church plant, I found my first volunteer when we had just 25 people. He didn't know the first thing about social media management, but he was fresh out of seminary and eager to help. So I showed him the ropes and put him to work.

There are a few things that you need to know about building a team. First, it takes time, energy, and patience. And until you've built your team, it's going to be yet another responsibility on top of everything else that you already have to do. So at the beginning, it's *more* work, not *less*. But don't give up, because in the long run it'll free you up to do what you do best.

Also, you need to look for people who are strong where you're weak. You're not looking for a perfect clone of yourself who thinks like you and who would act like you would act. Instead, you're looking for

someone who could complement your skill set and add vision and innovation where you might not naturally think to look.

Lastly, never be afraid to ask. The worst thing that someone can do is decline, but many times they'll feel honored that you've invited them to be a part of what God is doing in and through your church.

3. A Process
The third thing that you can take away from a larger church is a process.

One of the things that saves our team more headache and hassle than anything else is a good creative and communications process. When anyone in our church has a communications need, whether it's a print piece or a social media promotion or a website update or a video—anything—they need to fill out our communications request form.

If someone stops by our office to request something, our first response is, "Can you please fill out a communications request?" If they send me an email with an update that they want to make, I'll again ask, "Can you fill out a comm request?"

Today, we have grown large enough that we have an entire project management team who handles incoming requests. That's not likely the case for you. But you can still create a process that helps everyone out. For instance, in the past, we've used Wufoo for our request forms. And we use Asana—which scales really well for big and small churches alike—for project management.

You don't need a big team for this to be effective. Just having a request form and requiring people to use it can make your life easier. The important thing is that you not only create a system, but abide by it. If there are exceptions or emergencies, they really must be exceptional (and emergent). By and large, stick to the process. It might be frustrat-

ing for everyone involved for a while, but once you work out the kinks and train your pastors and staff and volunteers how to get things done through the system, you'll see a net gain in your church.

4. Ideas

The fourth area where you can steal from larger churches is in the realm of ideas. What I find most fulfilling about being in a church creative role is the amount of collaboration that takes place in our community.

Several years ago, when I was first getting started in my role at the Summit, I was about to leave for a conference in the Dallas-Fort Worth area when I got a Facebook message from a family ministries pastor at a small church a few hours away. He was going to be in my area that evening and wanted to pick my brain about church communications.

I had to catch a plane at 4 a.m. the next morning, but I responded, "Absolutely, let's get together." So we sat down for coffee and we talked about his church and his communication strategy, about how he could reach his community through digital communications.

The next morning, when I landed in Dallas, I drove straight to a lunch meetup that I had organized with some church communications professionals, some of whom I had already met, others of whom I had only interacted with online.

Before I left the next day, I had dinner with the creative arts pastor at a local church and breakfast with a new friend from The Village Church, who kindly and graciously walked me through some cool stuff they were doing with their church management system.

It was a tiring whirlwind, but a fun one.

Coming from a business background, collaboration like this just doesn't happen. Businesses compete; they don't share secrets. But when it

comes to the church, we're all working together for one mission. Collaboration only makes the entire church stronger.

On any given day, I'm probably talking to two or three church communications professionals, whether chatting online in a community such as the "Church Communications" Facebook group [3] or meeting someone locally and helping them with their church communications strategy.

If you're in a rut, ask. Reach out to folks and ask them for ideas, and I think you'll find that our community is gracious, supportive, and ready to share their wealth of resources.

5. Resources

Speaking of resources brings us to our last stop on this train. Larger churches have a lot of them, and many are willing to share them. Take them up on the offer.

At the Summit, it's a core value for us to share the knowledge and experience that God has brought to our church by letting others "copy off of our paper." We've learned so much from churches that have come before us, and we hope that we can pass that knowledge on to those who will come after us.

There are several churches out there who have curated the resources that they've created to share with hardworking church creatives and communicators who need it. Churches such as Life.Church have created a wealth of resources that you can download and adapt for your ministry right away.

Here are a few of the most user-friendly sites to explore:

- Life.Church Open Network: https://open.life.church

3 https://www.facebook.com groups/430618063788464

- The Village Church Resources: https://thevillagechurch.net/resources
- 12 Stone Church Resources: https://resources.12stone.church

If something isn't available through one of those libraries, you can often reach out and ask for a resource to get you started. Many communications professionals at larger churches will either have something to get you started or will be able to point you in the right direction.

Don't Steal These

We've explored a few things that your church can steal from larger churches and make your own, but there were a few things that I tried to implement when I was serving in a smaller church that just didn't translate to our context.

In fact, I believe that if you try to take these things from a larger church and implement them in yours, you could do real harm in your ministry. So write these things down and take them to heart.

1. Your Vision
The first thing that you can't take away from a large church is your vision.

At the core, every Christian church should be about two things:

- **The Great Commandment:** "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37b ESV).
- **The Great Commission:** "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19–20a).

In a sense, every church shares this vision. But just like God has created believers in the local church to be one body with many members, he has also equipped each and every local congregation with a unique commission to their city.

When I say that you can't borrow another church's vision, I'm referring to the unique contribution that *your* church can make in *your* city. This is something that you can't find in another church.

Our church's vision, for instance, is to plant a thousand churches in our generation. That's unique to our church, and we've organized our resources and our processes around that vision. From leadership development to communications to kids ministry—all of it is geared toward this vision, because it has become part of our DNA.

If you try to emulate that without all the slow, deliberate work that's gone into making our vision a reality, you're not going to be successful. You'll exasperate your people. Even worse, you'll miss the unique calling that God has for your church.

Your unique vision has to come from your church and your leadership. This comes through prayer, studying the Word, and being present in your community to see how your congregation can be part of making the kingdom of God a reality in your neighborhood.

2. Your Voice
The second thing that you can't take from another church is your voice.

Have you ever noticed how the author of each of the four Gospels was writing in his unique voice, with a specific audience in mind, and a specific message? They're all telling the same story, but each one is telling it from his unique perspective.

In the same way that God has given you a unique vision, God has given

your congregation its own voice to share the good news of the gospel with the nations, starting in your own backyard.

This goes beyond just the words you use and includes other elements of your church's brand, such as your social media style, design language, and tone.

Consider T.S. Eliot's words again:

> The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different from which it was torn; the bad poet throws it into something which has no cohesion.

The mark of a good artist is the ability to draw inspiration from others while incorporating those ideas into a cohesive and authentic whole.

When I visit my mother-in-law, we join her for service in the country Baptist church where my wife grew up. Their space feels like a typical Baptist church that was built in the late '90s. Clean white walls. Burgundy carpet. Padded pews. Stained glass windows.

Several years ago, they added projection screens above the choir, one on either side of the baptismal in the center of the wall behind the pulpit. The screens themselves don't feel particularly out of place. But occasionally, I'll see bold and edgy graphics up there that don't reflect the overall vibe of the congregation.

As you're browsing a church's website looking for inspiration for a new sermon series brand identity, keep your voice in mind. If your congregation is on the traditional side, a bold, modern, edgy style may feel out of place. If you're a small church, embrace that and resist the temptation to make yourself look bigger (or younger, or more urban, or whatever) than you really are.

Run with all of the creative ideas that you glean from other churches, but filter each one of them through your unique voice to make it your own.

3. Your Budget
The final thing that you can't take away from a church like ours is a budget.

To which you might say, *Obviously we don't have the budget that a larger church has. Why are you even telling me this?*

Even if you *say* you understand that, if you're like me, you probably still act *like* you have unlimited resources. I know that because when I was in a small church communications role, I found myself trying to do everything that big churches were doing. Like having a Great Dane's attitude with a chihuahua's stature, it was a recipe for disaster. There was no way that I could keep up.

Your budget consists of more than the financial ledger—it encompasses time, talent, and treasure.

- **Time** is the amount of hours that you have to invest in the communications at your church.
- **Talent** is your skill set and the skill sets of any staff or volunteers who serve with you.
- **Treasure** is the amount of financial resources that your church can commit to communications.

I have quite a bit more of all these things in my large church role than I did when I served at a smaller church. The reality is that the churches that you're comparing yourself to probably have a full-time designer, videographer, social media manager, and communications director. You can't match that with a mere few hours on the side.

So what's a small church to do? Practice resourceful excellence. Pick one, maybe two things that you're best at—and do them to the glory of God. Don't become discouraged by comparing yourself.

And as you get more resources, particularly the time and talent that come from building a good team, then you can do more with the resources that you have available.

Your Church (Yes, Yours!) Has a Vital Role to Play

As we come to the end of this chapter, I want to leave you with one final thought:

As church communicators and creatives, we have an incredible opportunity to learn from one another. We serve a God who has gifted each of us uniquely and called us to serve in diverse contexts. Whether you're at a church of 50 or 5,000, whether you're a full-time staff member or a volunteer, you have a vital role to play in the kingdom of God.

So as you seek to grow in your craft and effectively reach your community with the gospel, don't be afraid to look to other churches for inspiration. Observe what they're doing well, take note of the strategies and processes that have proven effective, and borrow the ideas that resonate with your heart.

But remember, your goal is not to become a carbon copy of another church. Your church has a unique calling, a distinct voice, and a God-given vision that sets you apart. So as you glean from others, always filter what you learn through the lens of your church's identity. Take the very best of what you discover, and then make it your own.

Wrap it in your church's voice. Infuse it with your congregation's per-sonality. Adapt it to fit your community's needs. And most importantly, undergird it with prayer and a deep reliance on the Holy Spirit's guid-ance.

As you do this, I believe you'll find yourself empowered to pursue the mission God has laid before you with renewed passion, creativ-ity, and excellence. You'll be equipped to make a lasting impact in your church and in your city, not by mimicking the success of others, but by faithfully stewarding the unique gifts and resources God has entrusted to you.

So go forth with confidence, knowing that the same God who called you to this work will also supply you with everything you need to fulfill it.

BEING A CREATIVE LEADER

Janetta Oni, Creative Director

As the creative director at a megachurch, I understand how my current experience might seem distant, unattainable, and downright unrelatable to many church creatives. However, I have been in your shoes. Before my role at the Summit, leading a team of 11 employees, I functioned as the entire creative department at another church for 10 years. I wore many hats: graphic designer, photographer, web content manager, social media director, and copywriter, often working with a shoestring budget (or none at all) and very limited resources.

During that time, I learned to be both resourceful and scrappy. I downloaded all the free fonts, got my degree at the University of YouTube, and even used a pirated version of Adobe Photoshop Essentials. (I'm an honest woman now.) I understand what it is to face the challenge of balancing creative vision with limited means. I understand the frustration of working in a role where few people fully grasp the creative process, often perceiving necessary procedures as bureaucratic red tape.

These experiences have shaped my understanding of creative leadership in the church. Both in my earlier, scrappier, do-it-yourself creative role and in my more established Summit role, I've picked up some insights and strategies for leading effectively. My hope is that whether you have a large team and a large budget or you are managing all of the creative responsibilities on your own, you'll find some help in the pages ahead.

Why Creativity in the Church?

Before we jump into strategies and know-how, we have to ask ourselves the question, *What are we even doing?* Why do we even have creativity in the church? Are we just the product of bored, dechurched millennials who needed the church to look just as cool and trendy as the world in order to trick them into coming to our services?

I don't think so. To answer this question, I'd like to take the conversation back a little further. Actually, a lot further, to the very beginning.

"In the beginning, God created..." (Genesis 1:1). God is many things to us—Father, Shepherd, King of kings, Lord of lords—but the first way he introduced himself was as Creator.

God is, to use the modern jargon, "a creative." And in his image, he made us—tiny creatives who are meant to follow his creative pattern.

When God put Adam and Eve in the garden, he called them to subdue the land (Genesis 1:28). This tells me that he wanted us to cultivate, to make order out of chaos. The ground was probably a little wild, and he wanted them to make it a garden—something that produced life, something that had order to it.

That's one of the things we creatives do: We cultivate the wilderness of chaos—the wilderness of colors, spectrums, ways of writing, and tones and sounds. Part of that process feels like chaos, like wilderness. But when we take all of these elements together and put them in order, we bring order from chaos, just like the Holy Spirit hovering over the water brought order. That is the *Imago Dei* in us, and that is us fulfilling a call that God has given us. We create as he created.

Since God is a creator, this means that creativity, *in and of itself*, is spiritual. Historically, the church has known this, which is why it has been

the headquarters for creativity for centuries. Many important pieces of art created hundreds (or even thousands) of years ago originated in the church, because the church was a cradle for creativity. Even now, it's telling that most people who showcase their vocal abilities on singing shows got their start in the church. There aren't many places other than theater where you can go and sing. The church still holds a crucial place for creativity, for beauty, and for explaining truths through song, art, and various media to get the message across.

That message is the gospel.

Creatives in the church humbly mirror God's method of revelation. The Apostle Paul says that God reveals himself through the world he created (Romans 1:20). Creatives do too: We don't just preach the gospel through words, but we also demonstrate God's existence through beauty and creativity. Everyday beauty does more than please the eye; it points back to the Creator.

God calls us his workmanship and has given us work to do. As creatives, we are created to create, continuing the cycle God initiated. Art and beauty are intrinsic to the church's mission—embedded in our Scriptures, our spirit, our very DNA.

It's Not About Us

At this point, it's important to clearly say this: Art and creativity are not the primary functions of the church. Art exists for the glory of God, to aid the ministers of the gospel to do their jobs better.

A prime example of this is the creation of the tabernacle in the book of Exodus. God gave very clear instructions to Moses, informing him that Bezalel was to head up the project (cf. Exodus 31). Bezalel was a gifted creative and, interestingly enough, the first person recorded in

the Bible to be "filled with the Spirit" (Exodus 31:3). He followed God's creative instructions to a T. If God wanted gold, blue, and purple yarn, some bowls and utensils, and some more gold, Bezalel rallied the people, leading them to create this masterpiece.

Eventually, they finished. And do you know what happens next? Moses attempts to enter the tabernacle and, well, he can't. All that creativity and *it didn't work.*

Why? Because all that stuff Bezalel and his crew made were means to an end. The end? The consecration of the people for the glory of God. In other words, once the book of Exodus ended, it was time for Leviticus. Yes, the book with all the rituals and sacrifices and instructions about "clean" and "unclean."

Bezalel's art was not the saving grace of God's people. It was a tool to get started in consecrating the people. And even the tools made of gold had no significance until they were consecrated. The people needed more than tools, more than art: They needed purification from their sins so that they could draw near. It was God—not our art—who set up the sacrificial system to pay for their sins so that they could enter his presence.

So what's the point, for Bezalel, for you, for me? God is. God is the point. Not our art. Not the artist. And this fact is the foundation for leading creatives. We can't move on until we digest this point.

As you're digesting this important truth, let me share with you three of the biggest lessons I've learned while leading creatives over the past 15 years: (1) why structures and boundaries help creatives thrive, (2) how to navigate imposter syndrome, and (3) what to do when the creative well runs dry.

1. Build the Fence: Why Structures and Boundaries Help

People often imagine creatives as tie-dye wearing, free-spirited individuals who float through life, disdaining hard work and rejecting structure. But in my experience as a creative arts leader, I've found this stereotype rarely holds true. My team includes a diverse range of creatives, and while some love ideating and trying new things, most fear a lack of boundaries and structure.

When faced with a blank Photoshop screen or a white sheet of paper and told to "do whatever they want," many creatives feel overwhelmed, as if they've been thrown into outer space. Anything is possible, so *everything* is possible. And faced with *everything*, creatives often feel stuck with *nothing*. They don't know where to start.

The opposite can be just as paralyzing. Giving creatives a strict play-by-play to execute, essentially copying something you've seen from the trendy megachurch down the road, kills creativity. The creative becomes nothing more than a worker bee with Adobe software. Over time, this will lead to disillusionment and a rotting of the creative soul.

So here's the problem in a nutshell: Creatives tend to crash and burn when given either *nothing* or *everything*. If you give them nothing to start from, they spend most of their time in a state of anxiety brought on by having to choose from limitless options. If you give them everything they should be doing, they can slip into a depressive frustration, feeling like nothing more than a printer. We all need a balance. We need boundaries that aren't suffocating.

To address this, I have learned to establish a fence for my team. This fence provides a boundary, consisting of a vision and specific guidelines within which they can operate. But the yard within that fence is large and allows them a lot of possibilities. It's the magical *something* between nothing and everything, providing limits while still encouraging innovation.

I got the idea during summer vacation a few years back. My kids needed to burn off some sugar, and my husband and I needed to sit and rest. We found something I had never known existed before—an indoor playground. It was perfect. Unlike other public playgrounds that are vast and open, this one had walls around it (and AC to boot). The usual constant checking to make sure our kids hadn't been kidnapped or wandered into the road? All of that was now unnecessary. No hovering parent needed; they were free to play.

What led to that freedom? Ironically, a boundary.

Setting clear boundaries for my team allows them the freedom to explore and create within a safe, structured environment, preventing the paralysis that can come from limitless possibilities. The fenced-in yard is big and full of possibilities. They can do whatever they want in the yard. They just can't go past the fence—which means I can lead without micromanaging.

Our fence can change from project to project. Sometimes, it's just a style boundary. For instance, recently I told our art director that I just wanted a campaign to look stately and timeless, because it would need to appeal to a more senior audience. I told him, "No trendy art. Give me serifs. Something professional. Think 'golf tournament.'" That was the fence. In that yard, the designer has both direction and freedom.

Other times, I have even *less* fence. For this year's Easter branding, my only fence was "minimal." We had done a lot of elaborate art recently, and I thought it was time for us to do something very clean. Here, the yard was huge, but there were still boundaries.

Most creatives thrive on problem-solving and bringing order to specific challenges. The fence provides an arena to solve those problems. Creatives don't want to tackle the chaos of the entire cosmos. Even if they wanted to, they can't. What they *can* do is focus on concrete proj-

ects. When given a clear vision, specific scriptural anchors, and initial visual ideas, they feel uplifted, rather than paralyzed—ready to bring order to that specific creative challenge.

2. I Have a *Real* Job: Fighting Imposter Syndrome
At my previous church, when I was the whole creative team, I went through a phase of feeling disrespected in my position. While people respected me personally, I was paranoid that they didn't respect the role I held. Have you ever tried to explain to your grandmother what a communications director at a church does? She just assumes I can fix her cable box (which, unfortunately, I cannot).

So what does an insecure person do to get respect? They force it. Instead of reassuring people that my contributions could help their event succeed, I threatened that, without me, their event would fail. It's a subtle but enormous difference.

I'm sure you can relate. I equated my self-worth with my job title, leading me to hold on to things too tightly. I wanted people to validate my worth through rules, instead of building trust.

When people didn't inform me of their needs in a timely manner or circumvented my processes, I took it personally. *Oh, so you think you can market your college event without me? Well, you broke about three of my policies so we will see if you even* have *a college event*. I didn't even have the authority to do that. But flashing my badge made me feel powerful. And feeling powerful made me feel important. And feeling important made me feel like I had a *real* job.

Imposter syndrome can make a person unreasonable. Your goals and calling take second place to "proving your worth." Instead of responding maturely, I became bitter, almost *wanting* their events to fail without my input—because that would prove my worth. Pretty twisted,

right? As you can imagine, this attitude stemmed from pride and self-ishness, which is far from Christlike.

What woke me up to my crazy behavior was a simple statement in one of Paul's letters: "Let your reasonableness be known to everyone" (Philippians 4:5 ESV). Rather than rigidly enforcing rules, I began to approach busy ministers proactively, offering to help them get ahead with their projects. I decided that helping them win was better than threatening that they would lose. That meant taking a few hits on the policy side—extending deadlines here and there, or allowing some exceptions to the process. But for the most part, once I became more "reasonable," I was able to enforce the policies I had without doing it from a place of pride. I began to use statements like, "Hey, I know you're really busy and probably don't have time to look ahead much. So I thought it would be helpful to go ahead and start the convo about student camp. Maybe I can help offload some of your future workload." By fostering open communication and understanding their pressures, I built better relationships and trust.

When I came on staff at the Summit, leading a larger team of creatives, I realized that most of them struggled with imposter syndrome just as I had. In this day and age, with free Canva accounts, exploding amounts of user-created content, and the rise of AI, creatives feel more and more obsolete. So when the ministry across the hall makes their own T-shirt design, those feelings of inadequacy surge, threatening to make us do silly things.

But that takes us back to our foundational theology: *We are not the star of the show.* If our self-worth is based on being first and feeling important, we will never be satisfied. (I'm hearing Angelica Schuyler when I write that, and I hope you are too.) We have to take on the role of supporting staff. We are the ones who help the ministry. We are not the ministry.

Let me just say that one more time for those of you in the back: *We are not the ministry.*

But we do serve the ministry. And serving is of great importance to our Savior. After all, he came to serve, not to be served. Finding our place in the body of Christ, knowing that God has called us to be a part of his amazing story—that's all we need.

Dear creative leader, you get to be a part of a great story, of which no one on your staff is the star. But because of the real Star, the story you are telling will last an eternity. Knowing your own place in the cast will help you to believe there is no need to prove yourself. Instead, you can daily enter his courts with thanksgiving, in awe that you have been given the privilege of going about our Father's business.

3. What to Do When the Creative Well Runs Dry
It inevitably happens. Writer's block. Creative lulls. The well is dry, and no matter how much you browse dribbble.com, you can't seem to shake it.

There are many ways to combat this. Just plug the request into Google and you'll get several articles with some specific number of ideas (usually seven, for some reason) to break through your dry spells. And I'm sure some of those articles can help. But I want to offer a couple words of advice that you won't find out there in the world, because it's foolishness to them.

Foolishness to the world—but for us, the very power of God.

Pray

I know what you're thinking—"Cute." Telling a Christian to pray about a problem has almost become a cop-out. We assume, *Duh, that goes*

without saying. But the truth is, most people have not done it yet. When did prayer only become our safety net and not our starting point? It's no longer the foundation we build our projects on, but the insurance policy we will claim if disaster just so happens to strike.

It may seem simple, or even cliché, but starting the creative process with prayer is foundational. And yet, many creatives don't begin with prayer. Maybe it's because professional creatives outside the church don't. I don't know. But inviting divine inspiration and guidance into our work is crucial.

Remember, the first thing we learn about God is that he is the Creator. "In the beginning, God created." Our creativity is an expression of being made in his image. So if you're struggling to bring order out of chaos, why not seek help from the God who has been bringing order out of chaos from day one (literally)? Asking for creative help from the best Creative there ever was or will be is, at the very least, smart professional networking. At its best, it's an invitation to create fruit that will last for eternity.

Ask "Non-professional" Creatives

Let's go back to the story of Bezalel building the tabernacle. Scripture shows us that he didn't do it alone. Not only did he have his right-hand man Oholiab, but he also found help from the entire body of believers. The people donated goods and offered their skills. Some had skills in woodworking, metal work, or yarn work. Others just had "stuff" they donated. As talented and anointed as Bezalel and Oholiab were, they couldn't do it alone. That was never God's intention. They were in charge, yes. But being in charge doesn't mean being alone.

I get it. You're the professional creative, so you probably won't think to look for help from people outside your field. It makes sense, but it

also severely limits your possibilities. If you refuse to get outside help, it's most likely because you're still trying to heal your imposter syndrome. You may think, *I'm the expert here. I'm the one who knows what he's talking about. They don't!* But one of the tasks we have as creative leaders, like Oholiab, is to steward the creativity that is present in others. Remember, God created all of us in his image, which means that there's some form of creativity in everyone you interact with. All around you, whether on staff or in your congregation, are people who aren't "professional creatives" but who have resources, perspective, and ideas that you don't. This isn't a threat to you. It is a blessing and responsibility to harvest.

Ask for assistance from God's people. Your coworkers. Your congregants. Your volunteers. Even your "out of touch" pastor. Engage those around you who have creative talents, even if they don't hold formal creative roles. Engage those around you who have a story or a perspective that you don't. By collaborating with others, you relieve the pressure of being the sole source of ideas. And I'm confident it'll help you break through whatever creative rut you're stuck in.

Go and Lead

As you navigate the unique challenges and blessings of being a creative in the church, remember this: Creativity is not just a skill or a job; it's a divine calling. Whether you're a one-person department or the leader of a large team, your work mirrors the creativity of our Creator. You bring order from chaos, making beauty out of the raw materials of life. This calling is not just about creating art or solving problems (though it is about those things); it's also about reflecting the glory of God through your work.

Your journey, filled with resourcefulness and resilience, is a testament to the power of perseverance and faith. Just as you have learned to

balance creative vision with limited means, you now have the opportunity to lead others to do the same. Your experiences, both challenging and rewarding, have equipped you to bridge the gap between different creative environments and to offer insights that can transform the way we approach creativity in the church.

Embrace the spiritual nature of your work. Start with prayer, inviting God to be the center of your creative process. Recognize the value of collaboration, drawing on the diverse gifts within your community. And always remember, your worth is not defined by your role or title, but by your identity as a child of God, called to serve and create for his glory.

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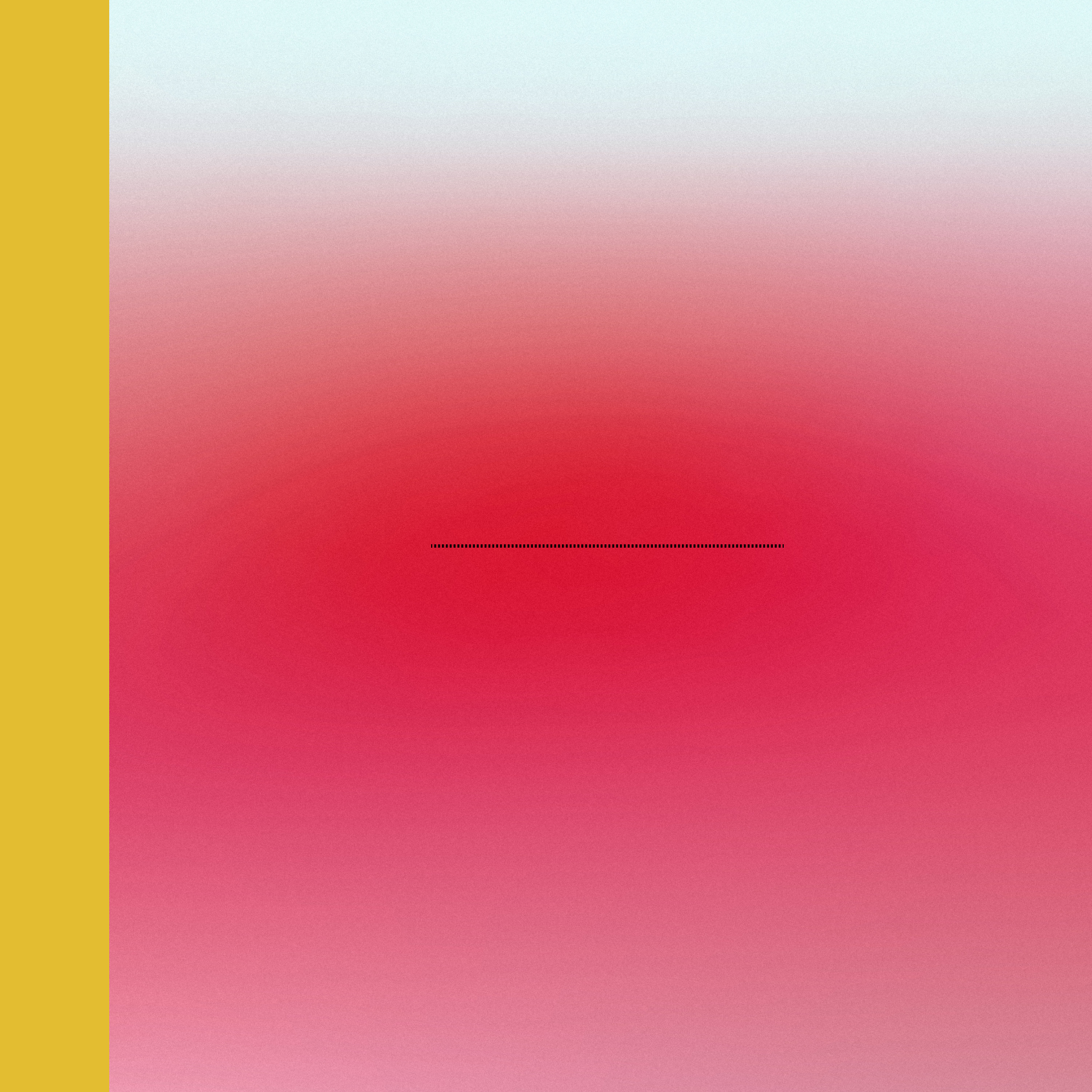
HIRING CREATIVES

Few topics are more sensitive than church and money. The fact is, there's a tension in which we all must live. (And who likes tension?) On one hand, you have the fact that the church is a nonprofit entity, run by people called to serve the Lord. On the other hand, those same people are not much different from other people with jobs, seeking to earn a living.

We generally understand the need for pastors and administrative assistants. Add in ministers, directors, a custodian, and a worship leader or two, and you've already exceeded the number of staff members most churches have. Because of that, many people see having a creative on church staff as a luxury.

Quite frankly, I agree—though I would use the word *privilege*. While I think art is essential in the church, hiring a creative isn't always necessary. In our day and age, most churches can (and probably should) fulfill their mission without hiring a creative at all.

However, there may come a day when a particular church has outgrown its current systems, and God has called that church to steward creativity for its local community and the church at large. This is no different from the other ways churches scale up as they grow. For instance, a church of 500 can probably get by with just one administrative assistant, while a church of 5,000 would be foolish to try and do the same. This principle holds true for creativity as well. The larger a church becomes, the more stewardship it has to manage. For a church

of a certain size, it actually becomes poor stewardship to refuse to hire creatives.

This stewardship includes both responsibility and generosity. Remember, having a creative on staff is a privilege that not all churches have. Therefore, churches that have this privilege must somehow leverage it for others. This can look different from church to church. For instance, it may mean sharing your sermon series graphics and videos with other churches going through the same content. Or, it may mean giving other churches access to the resources or knowledge that you have.

If your church needs a dedicated creative, consider making that shift in phases. Creative staff teams can exist on a spectrum between one person (which I've done) to a team of 11 (which I currently lead). However, hiring potential needs to be anchored in the question, "What does my church need in order to fulfill its mission?" You should not be hiring in order to pull off what some megachurch across the country is doing. You should not be hiring because you want to do more than your church leadership even wants to become. As our pastor often says, "Not everything from heaven has your name on it."

Now that we've gotten warning statements out of the way, let's talk about hiring. Who should you hire and for what type of role? We will discuss the single-person team, the two- to four-person team, and then teams larger than five.

Single-person Team

If you are hiring a creative, it will likely start with a role similar to my first role in communications, where I was the whole team. It's tough, but it's possible (as long as you acknowledge your limitations). Someone in this role must be "scrappy." They need to be a self-starter who can learn what they don't know and find the resources they need. They

must be an ambitious creative who toggles the line between "This is all we are capable of" and "Here's what we could be capable of."

These types of creatives are rarely satisfied. They can come off as frequently frustrated, but they are just hungry for more. For this creative, it's important to give them freedom with boundaries, as well as a clear expectation of who the church is, who the church aspires to be, and who the church never intends to become. And what is true of all staff members is particularly relevant for the one-person creative team: Encouragement is king. If they're doing a good job, let them know—early and often.

The one-person creative team will be your biggest challenger, so it's important to gain good rapport with them so that these challenging conversations aren't taken personally. They will require hands-on leadership: someone who can fan their flame, while recognizing that they are attempting to be a Swiss Army knife. Protect them from themselves. Protect them from copycat syndrome. Protect them from chasing after the wind.

What You Can Expect

A single-person team, hired for full-time work, can be expected to run a social media channel, update a website (probably using templates), take some photos of events (maybe only with a smartphone), and acquire premade assets for most of their other needs—such as slides, sermon series packets, and sermon bumpers (if they have been given the budget to do so).

Expecting this person to be able to create custom-made graphics and videos on a regular basis is almost certainly an unrealistic expectation.

The Two- to Four-person Team

If you are the creative leader and you've been given the green light to

hire one other person, the same type of energy is necessary. But now you need to factor in yourself and your limitations. What don't you do well? What is draining you? If you didn't have this kind of self-awareness before now, this is an essential time to find it. You need to find someone who can pick up your slack (yes, you do have some) and be a self-starter. But it's important to remember that with hire number two, you're creating a team. So your new hire must also be a loyal follower and a team player.

This kind of hiring process usually starts with the fact that the church needs more creative skills to fulfill its calling. Not only that, but it also has the budget to hire additional people to meet those needs. If your leadership has told you, "This is the direction we would like to go," and you know that direction is beyond your current skill set and stamina, then it's time to hire more people. On the other hand, if the only reason you would like to hire another person is because you've drowned yourself doing more than your leadership has asked of you, expecting hired help is unreasonable.

What You Can Expect

A team of two people working full time (or three people, equaling 80 total working hours) should be expected to have different specialized skill sets. I would suggest a graphic designer and a videographer, and if you have it, someone who focuses solely on updating digital content like social media or your website. Given their specialized focus and depending on their skill level, these employees can produce content that is original to your church on a regular basis. One of the team members may also be in charge of what goes on the screen on Sunday.

Teams of Five or More

A team of five or more is a luxury—or, to use the language I mentioned above, a privilege. This privilege costs more, and not just monetarily.

At this point, the leader of this team will need to shift her focus. No longer is the best use of her time acting like a Swiss Army knife, doing a little of everything. Now she must back away from producing content in order to cast a vision for others to create it. It's the shift from maker to manager, from doing to leading. A leader who is buried in Photoshop is scarcely any help for teams of this size.

The decision to hire at this team capacity follows the same rules as before, but also asks, *What does the team leader need to be free from, and what is it this leader needs to be freed to do?* For instance, my current role consists of a lot of meetings and what I like to call "time traveling." I'm often at least six months ahead of my team, anticipating what sorts of projects they'll be doing and what they'll need in order to accomplish them. I'm a bit like John the Baptist, clearing the way for them. I'm asking most of the questions with other departments, getting the "why" behind the "what" of each task, sharing expectations, and monitoring our team's load. To do all of that requires dedicated time and attention, which is why I don't do most of the specialized creative tasks on our team. I can, and I often have. But with a team of this size, it's simply not the wisest use of my time.

A church finds itself at this point due to having to serve many teams and many ministries. At this point, they essentially operate as a creative company, taking in multiple orders a day on top of the weekly Sunday needs.

What You Can Expect
At this point, you may find teams *within* your team. Perhaps there is a video team made up of two to three people. Or a digital team in charge of social media and website duties. Then, there may be a graphic design team in charge of the many slides, signage, and merch.

A team this size will most likely exist in a very large church, perhaps with multiple campuses or a large online influence. This means that

a team this size is rare and most likely unnecessary for the average church. Don't lose sight of that: Having a large creative team shouldn't be your goal or North Star; it's not the moon you are shooting for. The calling and mission of your church is the goal, and your team adjusts accordingly.

What's Right for You?

Hiring creatives within a church context is a nuanced decision that balances the church's mission, available resources, and unique gifts of the individuals on staff. Whether you're considering a single-person team or a multi-person department, it's crucial to assess your church's specific needs and mission.

Remember, having a dedicated creative is a privilege and is rarely a necessity for fulfilling the church's mission. When you reach the point where a creative team is essential, start by hiring individuals who are resourceful, passionate, and aligned with the church's goals. Support them with clear boundaries, a shared vision, and encouragement to thrive within their roles.

As you grow your team, focus on complementing skills and addressing gaps in your current capabilities. Recognize the importance of leadership that prioritizes vision casting and strategic planning over day-to-day content creation.

Ultimately, the goal is not to mimic other churches but to serve your unique community faithfully and creatively. By stewarding your creative resources wisely and generously, you can enhance your church's impact, both locally and beyond.
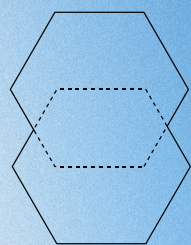
"MARKETING" THE CHURCH?

When I got my start in digital marketing more than 20 years ago, I didn't think twice about terms such as "lead generation" or "list building." It felt perfectly natural to define a target audience, to set up a campaign for a new product launch, or to run ads for a local business.

But when I took my expertise from my time with the digital marketing agency and applied it to the local church, something didn't feel right. Does Jesus *need* a marketing team? Shouldn't the gospel itself be the message?

As I spent time interacting with fellow church communicators, I realized I wasn't alone. Many church communicators—that is, staff and volunteers who are responsible for communicating in some way with their congregation, their community, or both—had some of the same "icky" feelings that I did.

Digital marketing for churches can be a touchy subject. On one hand, it's a powerful tool to extend your reach and communicate effectively with your congregation. On the other, the term "marketing" often carries connotations that might make some church leaders uncomfortable, evoking visions of cheesy advertising campaigns or unscrupulous salespeople. As our guest services pastor, Danny Franks, quips about our new membership classes, "Let me talk to my manager to see what we can do to get you into this church—*today!"*

As I've implemented digital marketing strategies at the Summit and

with clients across the US and Canada over the past decade, I've come to develop a more nuanced understanding of how traditional marketing methods and the unique ministry of the local church can coexist, or even enhance one another. Rather than approaching marketing in the same way for a ministry context as I would for a business client, I started to realize that the Christian life *is* marketing. Take, for example, the Great Commission:

> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19–20 ESV)

In the Great Commission, Jesus sent us on a marketing campaign of sorts. Except instead of sharing a message in the name of a brand such as Nike or a local pizza joint, we're sharing a message in the name of Jesus. Instead of telling people how wonderful a product or service is, we're telling people how wonderful the good news of the gospel is. And instead of trying to get money out of people's pockets, we're offering them something free—and priceless.

In the coming sections, we'll explore how *church* marketing differs from marketing in the business world, how church creatives and communicators can leverage marketing principles to equip the saints for ministry, and how you can implement these principles in your ministry context—no matter your location, your denomination, or the size of your church.

As you read this chapter, if the word "marketing" feels too worldly or consumeristic, try replacing it with "outreach" or "communication." The goal remains the same: to connect people with the message and mission of the church.

Church Marketing as Mission

When discussing marketing in a church context, we need to define our terms, since you and I (and your boss and your average congregation member) could have wildly different ideas of what "marketing" looks like. That difference in perspective could be driven by factors such as our ministry context, our professional background, our church size, or our role in our church.

I find that most church communicators have one of two visions for what marketing entails.

Vision 1: Church Marketing as Outreach

"**Go therefore** and make disciples of all nations…"

For some church creatives and communicators, church marketing is an outward-facing activity, aimed at reaching or attracting non-believers or disconnected believers to the church. In this view, the primary goal of marketing in the church is evangelistic, fulfilling the "go" side of the Great Commission.
If you're in this camp, you probably spend a lot of your time and energy reaching out to your community, creating content to reach a wider audience, or promoting the next big outreach event at your church.
The virtue of this approach is that it's clearly tied to the mission of the church. The potential liability, however, is that you may unintentionally neglect the people who are already in your congregation.

Vision 2: Church Marketing as Ministry

"Go therefore and **make disciples** of all nations…"

For others, church marketing is an inward-facing activity—keeping the congregation informed about events, initiatives, and sermon series.

Here, church marketing becomes a tool for shepherding your flock, fulfilling the "make disciples" side of the Great Commission.

If you find yourself on this side of the spectrum, you may spend a lot of time writing church newsletters, keeping your website up to date, or encouraging people in your congregation to attend a small group. The strength here is that you're aligning your communication with the needs of your congregation. The downside, however, is that you risk alienating the community around you by making them feel like you're having a conversation they haven't been invited to.

Vision 3: Church Marketing as Mission
Both of the approaches above are valid and important, each with its own strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and challenges. And in my experience, while church teams will generally lean heavily toward one view of marketing or the other, you'll likely find yourself doing some of both—serving both your community and your congregation.

Before you start debating with your colleagues about which one of these approaches to church marketing is the "right" one, let me propose a third way: church marketing as mission. The idea here is that our marketing activity should be intertwined with the mission of our church—both the Great Commission (which applies to all churches) and your church's calling (which is more specific and unique).

Viewing marketing as "mission" redirects the conversation from *what* we do back to *why* we do it. I believe that God has gifted you and your congregation with a unique role, in a unique place, at a unique moment in time. If that's true, your marketing efforts should be aligned with the specific calling that God has on your church.

Equipping the Saints for ~~Marketing~~ Ministry

As a church communicator, you may feel like the burden of ministry falls squarely and solely on your shoulders. After all, you're the voice of your church. You're responsible for managing the social media content, writing the emails, running the ad campaigns, printing the signage. If you don't do it—or worse, if you make a *mistake*—people won't hear the gospel, your ministry events will be a failure, and (let's be real, you've gone there), someone's salvation is probably on the line.

If that's you, let me give you a core biblical truth that should be like a warm balm for your soul: That's not your job.

"But wait," you may retort. "That's literally in my job description." That's not what I mean.

I mean that the role of "professional" Christians—that is, those of us on church staff or in a volunteer leadership role—isn't to do the work of ministry for our congregation. Our role is to *equip the saints* for the work of ministry. Consider what Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus:

> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, **to equip the saints for the work of ministry**, for building up the body of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11–12)

I teach my team that our role as creatives, communicators, and marketers is not to carry the full burden of doing ministry ourselves. While we're obviously called to be personally engaged in that work, our role, from an organizational perspective, is to equip the believers in our congregation to do the work of ministry.

We don't want our creative team carrying the weight of outreach, or teaching, or communicating. We want to plant the seeds in our community, and then we want to equip our congregation with tools they

can use to reach people in places where we as "professional Christians" can't—people such as their colleagues, classmates, coworkers, family, and friends.

We do this in two primary ways:

1. We create content that speaks to and ministers to the people in our congregation.
2. We encourage our congregation to *multiply* our effort by sharing that content with the people in their circles.

Think of how this expands our reach and influence.

The Summit Church currently has 28,000 followers on Instagram. If we create content for that audience alone, an average post might reach 10 to 20 percent of our total audience. That's between 3,000 and 7,000 accounts. Not bad, but not that impressive either.

But what if we used that platform to multiply our reach? Let's say that the average Instagram user has around 150 followers. (This is just a ballpark: Estimates are all over the place, but this is a conservative benchmark.) If we create content as a tool that helps our congregation engage with their friends and family who follow them, guess how many people we're reaching?

Roughly *4.2 million*.

There's no way that we could reach that many people on our own. By equipping our congregation to multiply our impact, we can reach people who we would never have access to otherwise.

Implementing a Mission-centered Marketing Strategy

So how can you start to implement a mission-centered approach to marketing in your church? Rather than get into the weeds with tools and tactics that may be outdated before this book goes to print, I want to give you some timeless principles that will hold true, regardless of the fads of the day.

1. Start with Why

In his classic TED talk, "How Great Leaders Inspire Action," Simon Sinek suggests that organizations function better and inspire more action when they start with their "why" rather than starting with "what" to do. [1]

Before you rush to the "what," ensure that you're clear about the "why." The foundation of your marketing efforts should be your church's mission and vision. As I mentioned in my earlier chapter ("Stealing for Jesus"), in one sense, all churches share a common mission and vision. We have the Great Commission (make disciples) and the Great Commandment (love God and love your neighbor).

But just like the body of Christ is one body with many members, so is the global church. God has placed you in your ministry context and gifted you to accomplish a particular task in a particular place and time. You should have a mission and a vision that are unique to the calling of your church. Chances are, you already do. "Marketing" is just another way that your church can live out that calling.

Take the Summit, for example. Our mission statement reads like this: "Following the Holy Spirit, we exist to create a movement of disciple-making disciples in RDU and around the world."

In that brief mission statement, we have a few principles that we can apply to marketing. Our marketing should:

[1] Simon Sinek, "How Great Leaders Inspire Action," TED talk, Seattle, WA, September 2009, 17 min., 47 sec., https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action.

"Marketing" the Church?

2 Derek Sivers, "How to Start a Movement," TED talk, Palm Springs, CA, February 2010, 3 min., 10 sec., https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxFt1B-ZiMTw.

1. **Create a movement.** [2] A movement is bigger than one person, or even one organization. It invites others to join. We reflect this in our marketing efforts by telling stories of what God is doing in our congregation and making our content more about others than ourselves.
2. **Produce disciple-making disciples.** Multiplication is a core value in our church. Because of this value, we want to be diligent not to do the work of ministry for our congregation, but to equip them with content and resources that our people can multiply and share with their friends, family, and colleagues.
3. **Reach people "in RDU and around the world."** In Acts 1:8, Jesus commanded his disciples to be his witnesses locally ("in Jerusalem"), domestically ("in all Judea and Samaria"), and internationally ("to the end of the earth"). We're called to minister to our people first, but we create content and implement strategies with the nations in mind.

2. Establish Clear Objectives and Metrics of Success

With your "why" in mind, the next step is to define clear objectives and metrics of success. Otherwise, you may find yourself following the nonsensical pattern of the Cheshire Cat in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland:* "If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there."

Getting clear on your objectives and metrics of success does two things:

1. It aligns your team—and your church as a whole—with the "why" behind the "what."
2. It sets the foundation for measuring success.

Thinking back to our mission statement, our metrics of success are informed by those values. How do we define a "movement"? Growth and momentum. How about "disciple-making disciples"? Engagement.

Shares. Connections. And "in RDU and around the world"? We identify areas and demographics that we want to reach strategically and measure engagement and impact in those areas.

Ultimately, your bottom-line metrics should flow out of some sort of connection with God or life change. Granted, measuring connection with God is difficult, especially in social media data, so you'll often need to find tangential indicators of success and combine those objective indicators with anecdotal or qualitative data, like talking to your people or conducting church surveys.

3. Understand Your Audience
In order to reach your people, you need to know who they are. This is true of both the people in your congregation and those in your community, and includes both demographics—attributes such as age, gender, race, and ethnicity—and psychographics—attitudes, interests, and behaviors.

There are two types of data that you can tap into in order to understand your audience in this way: quantitative and qualitative.

Quantitative data consists of hard numbers. What percentage of our city is Hispanic? How many college students are within a 20-minute drive of our church? How frequently does the average congregant attend our church? What percentage of members are engaged in a small group?

For the savvy marketer, there are a number of sources that you can consult to find this sort of information.

To gather data about your community, consider using resources such as United States Census Bureau data [3] or demographic data from resources such as City-Data.[4]

3 https://data.census.gov

4 https://city-data.com

To get to know your congregation, you'll find a wealth of data in your church database. At the Summit, our church database is powered by Rock RMS. Rock gives us access to aggregated engagement metrics regarding how many people are attending, how often they're attending, if they're plugged into small groups, etc.

Churchwide surveys can also help shed light on what's important to your congregation as a whole.

When it comes to giving us a picture of our audience, this sort of objective, aggregate data can paint some broad strokes, but it lacks depth and detail. To complete the picture, we need personal context, and that's where qualitative data comes in.

Qualitative data can't be neatly represented numerically. These are stories. Anecdotes. Pastoral notes. You can even find qualitative data about your community by skimming through conversations in online communities such as local Facebook groups or Reddit.

But perhaps the most important way to learn about your audience is to be present with the people in your congregation and your community. If you don't spend time with your people, you won't know what's important to them. What they're thinking about. What they're struggling with. Personal experience adds color and insight to the objective and impersonal data you gathered empirically.

A valuable activity to help cultivate qualitative data-seeking is to create marketing personas. We did this with our interns a few summers ago.

A marketing persona is a fictional representation of a person who is a "stand-in" for a specific type of person in your congregation or community. Creating a persona gives you a more concrete picture that you can hold in your mind when you communicate. Rather than, "What

would a suburban mom think about this?" you can ask, "What would Sarah think about this?"

When creating these personas, it is important to make them both *fictional* and *representational*.

Fictional, because using a real person as a persona would unintentionally bias your communication to that specific person. Creating a generalized, impersonal persona provides more ambiguity, which lends itself to a wider audience.

Representational, because you want to capture the demographic and psychographic profile of a segment of your audience. There's not much value, for instance, in appealing to West Coast techies if you live in rural Vermont. Pick profiles that accurately represent your area.

This example[5] is of a marketing persona that our summer creative interns developed as part of a marketing project they worked on.

4. Assess Your Resources

> "For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, **whether he has enough to complete it?**" - Luke 14:28

As you are implementing a marketing strategy for your church, you need to be realistic about what you and your team (if you have one) are able to accomplish. At the Summit, we often say, "Not everything from heaven has our name on it." By that, we mean that there are many things that we *could* do—good things, godly things—but the list of what we are *called* to do is much shorter.

All churches have finite resources, and your opportunities will always be greater than the resources you have available. This is just as true

5 Suburban Mom
Sarah McAlister

Demographic Details
Age: 35
Location: Suburbs of Raleigh-Durham, NC
Family: Married to John, a software engineer, with two children - Emily (7) and Noah (3)
Education: Bachelor's degree in Marketing
Occupation: Part-time freelance graphic designer

Profile
Interests: Family activities, graphic design, cooking, movies
Values: Family, faith, creativity, community
Challenges: Busy schedule, feeling overwhelmed, finding a convenient time for church, past negative church experiences
Communication Preferences: Active on social media, particularly Facebook and Instagram
Church Involvement: Open to finding a new church home, but has not yet found the right fit
Family Structure: Two-parent household with two young children

at the Summit as it was when I served with a 40-person church plant. This means that you will *always* have to prioritize your efforts, often eschewing good things to do great things.

The objectives that you established earlier should serve as your North Star, by which you can align and prioritize your marketing efforts. When you're tempted by a shiny new social media app or you see a great new idea on some other church's Instagram account, ask yourself a few questions:

- Does this bring me closer or further away from our core objectives?
- If I do this, will it take time and energy away from something that is already working well?
- Who will be responsible for maintaining this?
- Do we have the necessary skills and expertise to execute this idea effectively?
- Is this the right time to implement this, or should we revisit it later?
- Do we have the budget to support this without compromising other essential activities?

"Resources" here doesn't just refer to budget, by the way. Human capital is often even more scarce than monetary resources, and assessing your resources *must* include an honest look at what you can realistically accomplish with the team that you have available. A one-man (or one-woman) band will approach this entirely differently than a large team would.

Here's how you can approach this, based on your team size:

- **One-person team:** Your biggest challenge is going to be keeping up with everything, so narrow your focus to the essentials and don't get distracted by nonessential things. Look for ways to engage volunteers in your congregation to help with outsourceable tasks.

- **Small (2–3 person) team:** Start to specialize. Define roles and run in your lane. Develop processes that let you spend less time managing the work and more time on creative output.

- **Growing (4–10 person) team:** As your team grows, you can get even more granular about specialization, but you run the risk of becoming siloed off. Collaboration becomes more important here than in smaller teams, so invest time in keeping everyone on the same page and moving toward the same goal.

- **Large (10+ person) team:** Working with a large team, it may *feel* like you have unlimited resources, but in some ways, large teams are even more resource-constrained than smaller teams. You're likely supporting a much larger organization, which means without a plan to manage inbound requests and track projects, your team will get overwhelmed. Consider adding a project manager to the team to help direct the chaos and establish clear guidelines, policies, and processes for managing the work.

I'll close this section with a bit of wisdom that I learned from a mentor when I was in our pastoral apprenticeship. Referring to ministering to your people, he said, "Look for areas of *intersection*, not *addition*." That is, rather than stacking new and discrete tasks on top of one another, look for areas where they intersect. Instead of adding a pastoral visit to your day, for instance, invite someone to lunch. Or invite a young protégé along with you for pastoral work you're already doing.

The same thing applies to digital marketing in the church. Look for areas where your marketing efforts intersect. A single piece of content, for example, could be repurposed for multiple platforms. If you're recording a podcast, grab a couple of photos to use as content later. It takes no additional effort but will multiply the work that you're already doing.

5. Choose Your Tactics

Finally, you can choose your tactics.

Tactics are the specific, nitty-gritty actions that you're going to take to accomplish your marketing and communication objectives. Again, the tactics that you choose should be informed by your mission, your objectives, and your resources.

Below are some common areas you may want to consider when defining the tactics that are important to you, as well as some questions that can help you evaluate each one and consider where that tactic fits in with your overall marketing strategy.

Website
- What are the essential elements that we need to accomplish our goal (e.g., sermon archive, events calendar, etc.)?
- Who is the *primary* audience for our website—our congregation, or our community?
- What content should we have on our website, and how often should we update it?

Email
- Do we have a plan to curate and maintain an email list?
- Are we respecting our recipients' inboxes by sending only timely and relevant content in a consistent manner?
- Can we segment our email list to make sure we're not overwhelming our recipients with information that isn't relevant to them?

Social Media
- Which social media platforms will most effectively help us accomplish our marketing objectives?
- What types of content will best achieve those goals? Posts? Reels? Stories? How can we use these together strategically?

- What content can we repurpose for social media channels?

- Do we have a plan for engaging with our congregation and/or community when they reach out online?

- Do we have an established social media policy to equip our team to use social media wisely?

Paid Advertising

- Are we able to accomplish our goals with organic marketing strategies alone? Or do we need to set aside a budget for paid advertising in order to meet those objectives?

- What segments of our audience—internal or external—are we not reaching organically? Is there a paid channel that will help us reach them?

- Will investing in paid advertising help multiply our organic effort? Can investing budget in paid channels free up human resources for other activities?

Video (YouTube)

- What is the purpose of video sharing? Is it strictly archival, or do we want to invest effort into creating derivative content?

- Could producing original content help us accomplish our marketing goals?

Other Marketing Channels

- Do we need a mobile app? What will an app accomplish that we can't do with our website?

- Have we considered use cases for text messaging?

- Are we leveraging podcasting effectively? Could we engage more of our audience if we produced derivative content from our sermons, rather than just posting a full message each week?

Every community, every church, every communicator is unique, so the decisions you make here won't be the same as what I would do. That's okay—you know your ministry better than anyone else. Choose the

tools and tactics that fit your specific needs, and resist the urge to do something just because it seems like everyone else is doing it.

How to Evaluate—and Optimize—Your Marketing Efforts

No marketing plan would be complete without a deliberate process for evaluating whether you're on the right track, and then adjusting accordingly. Your work as a marketer doesn't end when the campaign is over, or the blog post is published, or the sermon series ends.

The most important element in evaluating the results of your marketing efforts is gathering your data. Nearly all marketing channels—whether that's social media, search engines, websites, or email—have analytics dashboards available to you.

Below are some digital marketing channels, with a brief overview of some of the key metrics that you may want to track.

Social Media

While the features and culture of each social media platform may differ, the general principles for measuring success remain the same across Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/X, and others. You'll find the relevant metrics in the platform's "Insights" (Meta) or "Analytics" (Twitter/X) section.

Here are some key metrics to look for:

- **Audience size:** This encompasses the number of people who currently follow or "like" your account. Be aware that audience size can be a "vanity metric," meaning it doesn't correlate directly with meaningful results. Still, even though metrics such as reach and engagement tell a clearer story about your ac-

count's impact, audience size is still worth tracking, especially over time.

- **Reach:** This refers to the total number of people who saw a post. Reach can be measured in total impressions (meaning the number of times a piece of content was seen) or in the total number of accounts reached. Both are valuable. The former can help you evaluate which content is getting the most traction. The latter can give you an honest look at how many people in your total audience are seeing your content. As a baseline, the typical post will reach between 10 and 20 percent of your total audience.

- **Engagement:** This describes the number of people who did something in response to your post—liked it, commented on it, shared it, etc. Engagement is an important metric because *engagement drives reach*. Social media algorithms reward creators who produce engaging content by showing that content to more people, which in turn grows your audience size.

Website

Website metrics give you an idea of how people are browsing your website, including what they're looking for, what content they're engaging with, and how long they're spending on your site. This data tells you two things. One, it can help you find "bright spots" where content is performing well. Two, it can help you identify potential barriers to getting people to the content that you want them to reach.

Look for the following metrics in Google Analytics or in your website provider's analytics dashboard:

- **Total visitors:** This shows the number of people who have visited your site in a given time frame. You can track this metric on certain days or times, such as on Sunday mornings, to evaluate how your site is performing as a resource. You can also track

this metric month-to-month over time to see how your audience and reach has grown.

- **Traffic sources:** This will help you find out where people are finding your site—such as social media, search, links from third-party websites, or direct traffic.

- **Time on site:** This metric shows you how long people are spending on your site or on specific pages. Sometimes, you want people to spend a lot of time on your site, such as when they are watching sermons or browsing resources. Other times, you want to *minimize* time on certain parts of your site, such as your giving page, because you want that page to move them to action.

- **Pages visited:** Look for the pages that are getting the most traffic. On most church websites, the sermons page will likely get a lot of traffic. Your congregation will likely engage with your events page, while prospective guests may spend more time on your staff page, your first time guest page, or your "About Us" page. You may want to track this metric more closely for specific pages in specific seasons as well, such as your Christmas or Easter landing pages.

If you see that content that should be getting engagement isn't getting the attention that you expected, you may want to look into usability issues on your site that may be preventing people from finding the page—broken links, slow load times, etc.

Email

These metrics will give you an understanding of how people are engaging with the email content that you're sending them. The specifics vary among service providers, but the gist is the same. Here are some metrics you may want to track and optimize:

- **List size:** This tells you how many people are on your email list.

If your church is growing, you'll probably want to see this metric increase.

- **Open rate:** This shows you how many people are opening your emails. A highly engaged email list may have a 50 percent open rate. A larger email list may have a much lower open rate—10 percent or lower. Optimize this metric by writing compelling subject lines and occasionally purging unengaged or broken email addresses from your list.

- **Click rate:** This is the number of people who click a link in your email, as a fraction of the number of people who opened your email. If your emails are strictly informative with no call to action, this metric may be low. If you're trying to get readers to take a specific action, though, you'll want to optimize for this metric by writing clearer calls to action and making the next step more visible.

Paid Advertising

When running paid ads, it's especially important to keep track of key campaign metrics because doing so will help you get the best results for your investment.

Again, these metrics may vary from platform to platform, but they all share the same set of basic principles. Look for the following metrics: Impressions: This signifies the total number of times your ad has been shown.

- **Frequency:** This refers to the average number of times an individual has seen an ad. A viewer may need to see an ad several times before he or she takes action, so a high frequency may not be a bad thing. If you find that users are seeing your ad several times and not taking action, however, you may need to optimize either your audience or your ad creative.

- **Click-through rate (CTR):** This is the average number of clicks per impression. A good CTR can be around 3 to 5 percent, mean-

ing out of 100 total impressions, three to five people click. Optimize your CTR by improving audience targeting (thus, making your ad more relevant) or optimizing your ad creative, such as your image, video, copy, and/or call to action.

- **Cost per click:** This is how much you're paying per click on your ad. This could also be measured as "cost per action," such as cost per lead/email, cost per purchase, etc.

In some ways, it's easier to optimize paid ad campaigns than it is to optimize organic digital marketing activities, because we're able to assign monetary value to the results. Be prepared to spend time monitoring and optimizing paid campaigns to get the best return for your investment.

I've Evaluated My Marketing Efforts—Now What?

Once you have good data on your marketing campaigns, you can begin to optimize your efforts. The beauty in optimizing digital marketing campaigns is that, while the medium and the specific features of each platform or channel may vary, the underlying principles are timeless fundamentals of marketing.

If something is working, do more of it. If something isn't working, do something else.

Just remember that it's *essential* to establish clear objectives and metrics of success before you can evaluate your results. These will serve as a basis for making educated decisions based on insights and reporting from the digital tools that you're using.

If you haven't prepared, you can't have conversations about what's working and what's not, because you don't know what you're aiming for.

Here's to Fresh Ideas!

Many tomes have been written about digital marketing tactics. The mechanics are the same, regardless of whether you're marketing for a company, for a product, or for the church.

What I hope to have established here is a framework for taking those skills into the unique environment of the local church, applying the timeless principles of marketing to the greatest story ever told. I hope something in this chapter will spark a fresh idea, inspire you to try something new, or help you refine something you're already doing. I pray that your congregation—and your community—will feel the difference.

SOCIAL MEDIA

**the four most
helpful tricks
you need**

Social media can feel like a multi-headed beast. A thousand and one ideas ping-pong in your mind as you try to keep up with the rhythm of trends and innovation. It seems like you're sprinting on a treadmill with no finish line in sight. You can feel the overwhelm creep over your body, inch by inch, leaving you drained and exhausted.

Or perhaps, for you, it's actually the complete opposite: You're staring at a blank page, hoping the foggy cloud looming above you breaks, just for a moment, to let the sun spill out with a fresh new idea. But the more you wait, the more you're met with an uninspiring gray haze.

Your social media story doesn't have to end there. Sure, social media can be an overwhelming place to be. But there are ways to navigate and overcome the constant hustle and bustle of this world.

I'm here to help. In this chapter, I'll be discussing why social media is important, what it does well, and specific ways you can utilize it for your church. The good news is, making the most of social media is much easier than you think. And chances are, you already have most of the tools you need.

Let's get started.

Why Is Social Media an Important Tool and Resource for a Church?

Technically, "social media" can refer to dozens of different online platforms. But for now, I'm going to limit myself to Meta's social platforms—primarily Instagram and Facebook, two of the most popular platforms used in church organizations and a great starting point to engage a variety of different demographics.

Of course, many of the concepts and ideas I'm about to cover can be integrated into other social media platforms too. (And who knows? Maybe one day we'll venture over to those other platforms. If there's one thing I can say for certain about social media, it's that the future is tough to predict.)

Social media does two things really well: (1) It allows you to grow your online presence and (2) it provides you with a way to build an online community. Both goals are related, and in the twenty-first century, both are important. After all, you can bet that most individuals in your church already have a social media account of some kind. You can think of your church's social media account as an extension of the personal relationship you already have with people in the congregation. At its best, social media can be used as a way to interact with your church family—by allowing for ongoing communication, the ability to share stories within the church, and a way to build a lasting community. If you're nervous about jumping into social media, take a deep breath. Social media can be—and often is—used to enrich the church.

Not only is your church's online presence an opportunity to foster the relationships you already have, but you can also utilize a social media account to reach a broader audience of people—both those who are new to the Christian life and those who do not know Christ at all (yet!). By creating compelling content, sharing inspirational messages, and aiming for specific audiences, your church can reach individuals

who are seeking spiritual guidance or looking to connect with a church community.

But social media can't do it all. It's a useful tool for communication and marketing, yes, but it's not a magic pill that you can take to grow into an overnight success. There is a fine line between underutilization and overutilization of its capabilities. If you're all-in on social media, keep in mind its limitations: Social media works best when used as a digital marketing tool to help assist you in your goals. But it should not be used as the primary means with which you communicate and market to your audience. Your primary touchpoint with people today will be the same as it has been for the last 2,000 years—real-life interactions with real-life people. Social media can supplement the life of the church, but it will never replace it.

The truth is, I could offer you 40 tips and tricks for using social media well. But that wouldn't be very helpful—or, really, very honest about social media best practices. The more I thought about the core principles of social media engagement, the more I came back to a handful of simple skills—just four. So I want to walk you through what I deem to be four of the most helpful tricks when it comes to utilizing social media: (1) making reels, (2) using Canva, (3) repurposing sermon content, and (4) writing helpful captions. Having these four tools in your belt can make creating content more enjoyable, more efficient, and (most importantly) more effective.

1. Reels

A reel—what's that?

Although there are many ways to build a community online, one particular feature reigns supreme in the world of social media: reels.[1] A reel is a short-form video feature on Instagram and Facebook that lasts

1 As of June 2024, anyway. Like I said, the future of social media is a mystery.

less than 90 seconds. Since reels are designed to be viewed on mobile phones, reels are framed with a 9x16 ratio—that is, essentially portrait-style, the way a phone is oriented. Reels are designed for quick, entertaining, engaging content. The key to a successful reel? Getting your message across quickly and concisely.

How do I create a reel with tools I already have?

Most of us know what makes a social media reel worth watching. But how do you make one worth watching? One of the beauties of social media is that all that you need in order to create is (usually) at the tip of your fingers. You don't necessarily have to own fancy camera equipment or have technical editing skills to create a simple reel on social media. The only required equipment is a phone with a camera.

To make a well-rounded reel, you'll want to keep in mind three key elements:

1. Give your video a subject or focal point.
Any well-made reel will have a subject. For the average reel, that might be a bit of celebrity news, or a sports highlight, or a silly parenting hack. The clearer the subject, the more likely people are to stick around. For our purposes, you'll most likely be focusing on something involving your church—whether it be specific people in your church, a Bible verse you want to highlight, an event your church just had, or an important point that your pastor made during the previous Sunday's service. It doesn't have to be earth-shattering, but it does have to be obvious. Including a subject for your reel helps to give it purpose and will allow your audience to focus on the subject at hand.

2. Give your video a purpose.

When creating a post online, think about what you are trying to *accomplish* with the content. What message do you want to send to your audience? Is it about an upcoming event you want people to register for? Is it to highlight an important point your pastor talked about in this past Sunday's sermon? Is it simply to draw people to your channel who aren't yet aware of it? Each purpose entails a specific call to action, so be sure you have a call to action that matches the purpose of your reel.

3. Give your video visual appeal.[2]

Social media is a patently visual medium, especially with reels. The first thing people notice when scrolling on social media is visuals. It's an image—or a *super* short video clip—that makes users stop in their tracks and pay attention to the content. You don't have the luxury of assuming people will be watching all 90 seconds of your reel; you've got to *reel* them in within the first couple of seconds. If you don't, they'll simply keep moving. Your reel should be both visually appealing and attention-grabbing, beautiful and gripping. In order to achieve a sense of visual appeal, you'll want to use high-quality images or video clips, vibrant colors, and engaging graphics that capture the viewer's attention as they scroll through their social media feed.
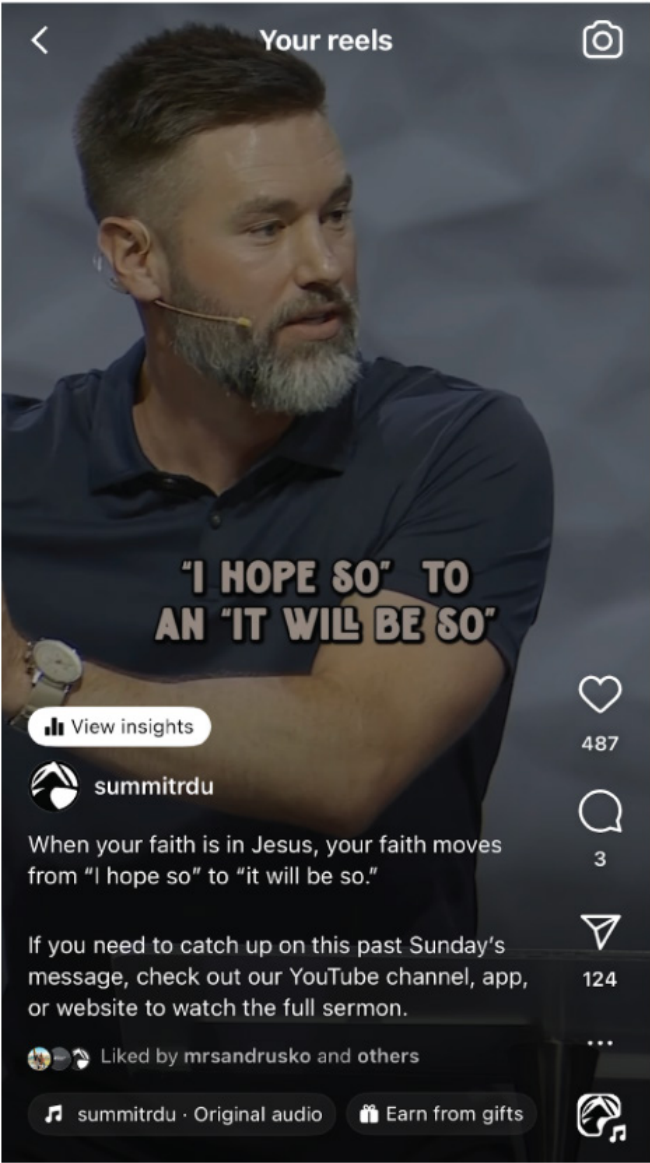
A Here is an example of using clips of sermons. Overlaying closed-captioning helps the viewer to stop and slow down so they'll watch a video.
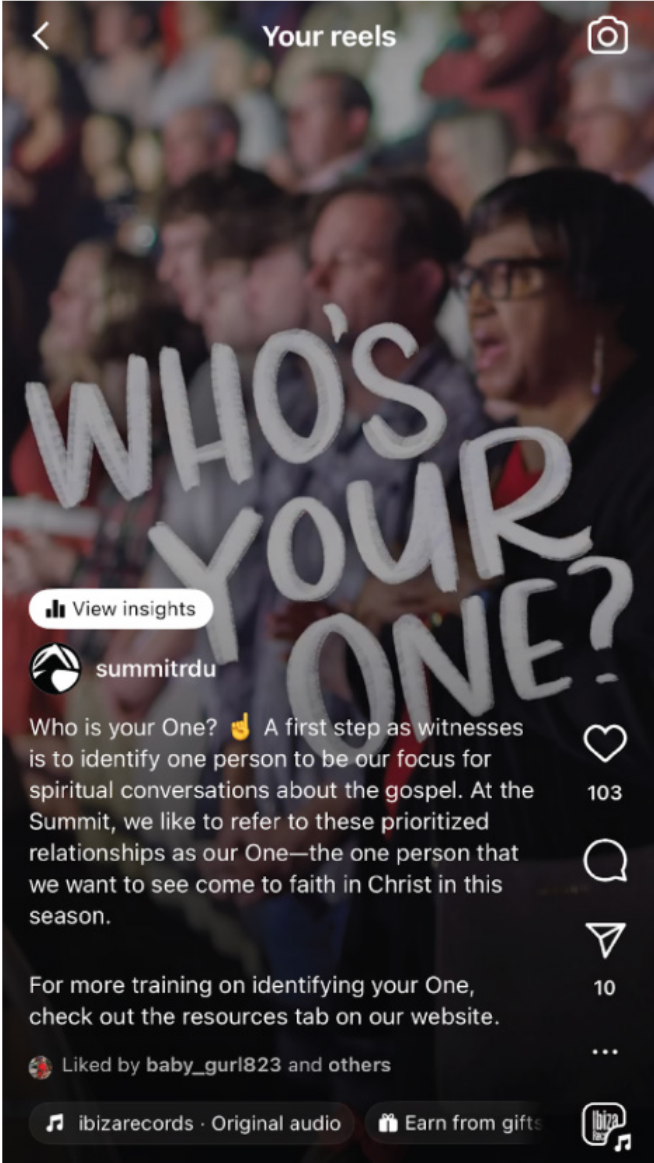

B Here we have a reel asking the viewer, "Who's your One?"—a question The Summit Church often asks our congregation, in an effort to pray for and evangelize to a person in their life. The caption gives more context to the reel and offers a call to action and next steps.

2. Canva: A Social Media Manager's Best Friend

If you can take a video on your phone, you can create a reel. But what if you want to go further, diving deeper into how to create a visually appealing piece of content that will resonate with your audience? Your next stop is a special tool named "Canva."

Canva is an online graphic design program, specifically made for creating social media content. If you aren't design savvy, don't worry: Canva is user-friendly and simple. You don't have to be a designer to use Canva well; in fact, most people who use it aren't.

Generally, the easiest way to navigate Canva is on the computer desktop. I do this more often than not. But if you tend to be on the go, Canva also provides a mobile version for your phone. One useful aspect of Canva is that you can build a team of members from your church who likely need access to certain design assets—sermon slides, YouTube banners, general promotional materials, etc. This makes sharing content and branding between teams an easy and effective way to collaborate on designs.
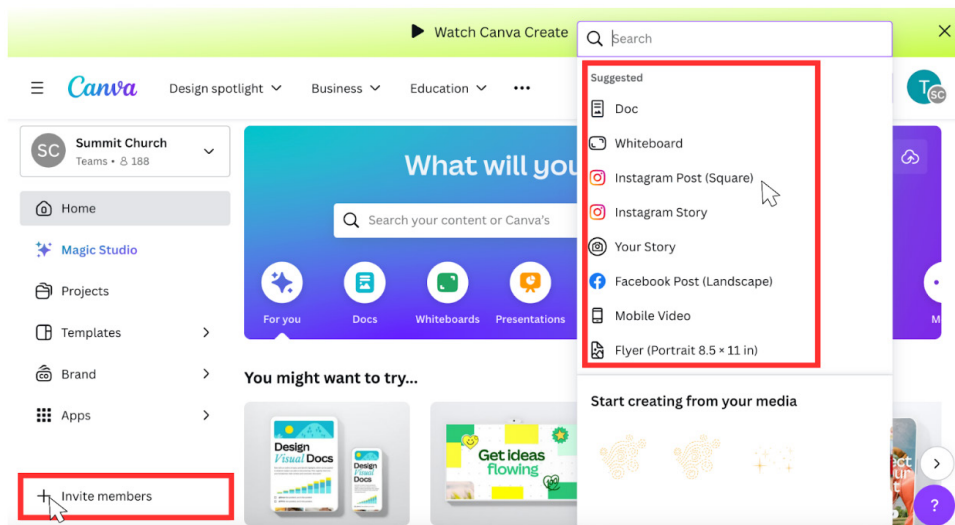
C Here, we're looking at Canva's homescreen, with a couple of the most helpful areas to get started highlighted in red. If you click the "Create a post" button on the top right, you'll see a dropdown box with different template options to choose from–whether it's a social media post, a mobile video, a Facebook post, or an Instagram story. The bottom left box shows where you can easily add members to build your team and share designs.

One of my favorite features of Canva is their pre-made templates, which really help eliminate the panic of the blank page. Canva provides hundreds of these templates, which you are then able to edit however you would like. For example, you can manipulate fonts, colors, and graphics. You are even able to upload your own photos and videos to use in tandem with the templates.

If you want to go further, Canva allows users to create a collection of "brand templates," where you can make your own templates for future use. Whether it's a branded sermon series or a recurring event, you'll have it saved in Canva so you don't have to create it again. This is especially useful when needing to collaborate among several teams.

D Here, we have a design screen open, with two areas highlighted in red. The box on the left shows where you can find the "Brand" tool, where you can store any brand elements for easy access when creating a design. The top right box shows where you can easily save any design you create as a "brand template" for others on your team to use for quick editing.
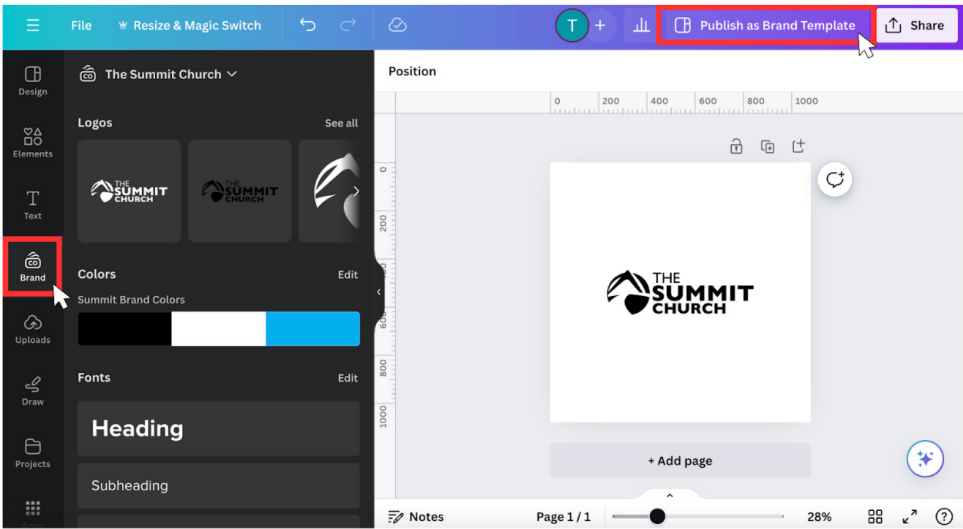
Overall, Canva is a great way to build on existing design talents your team may already have, and an even greater companion for those who have little to no experience in the design space.

3. Repurposing Sermon Clips

When it comes to social media, it's often more about capturing the content that already exists, rather than creating new content. The most obvious example is the weekend sermon. Most likely, you already have existing videos or sermon clips from your church; they probably even live on the internet. Now all you need to do is clip a short segment from a past sermon. Not only does this make your job a lot easier, but it also provides people with a short and concise summary of the sermon in the span of a seconds-long video. A reel of a pastor teaching not only helps the audience become acquainted with leaders in the church but also creates a strong sense of community, since they are able to engage with a practical message and share it with friends.

What should I look for in a sermon clip?

Finding the "right" moment for a sermon clip can be tricky. The most important element to keep in mind is context—or, more accurately, lack of context. Remember, not every person who comes across your reels necessarily belongs to your church, so you want the reels you post to be understood outside of the context from which you pull them. And most people watching them—even if they heard the sermon—won't remember what came just before or after it. So be sure that the part of the sermon you are wanting to clip is able to stand on its own, without further context.

Once you've found some options that can stand alone, look for a clip that leaves your viewers with a lasting impression. A reel should have some power to it, so don't cherry-pick clips that make people shrug their shoulders. Choose the moments that offer encouragement, challenge, or practical guidance.

4. Caption, Caption, Caption

Social media may be a visual medium, but that doesn't mean you can ignore the text. And for most social media posts, that text lives in the caption.

Creating a caption is, strangely enough, one of the toughest and most time-consuming parts about finalizing a post on social media. It's the last piece of the puzzle. It needs to complement the visual post without being redundant. It needs to be engaging, but not over-the-top and in-your-face. Not as simple as it seems.

Here are three ways to ensure that your caption stands out among the rest of the noise online:

1. Keep it short and simple.
Typically, shorter captions produce better results. Remember the medium: People are online for quick entertainment and fast-paced learning. Captions should add context to your post but should be easy to digest by the viewer. After all, the main message should stem from the actual photo or video that you are posting. So keep it brief: Most of the time, one to four sentences will do. If you do need to beef up your caption with longer text, help people out with some breaks in the text. Add spaces in between paragraphs to visually break up different points and ideas you want to make.

2. Give it a call to action.
Including a call to action in your caption encourages your audience to do something more than simply view the reel—whether it's getting connected to your church's website, registering for an upcoming event, or engaging in the comment section. People are primed to take this kind of step, but they usually need a little nudge. So provide clear direction within your caption.

3. Write like a human.

Although it may be tempting to copy and paste a caption written by ChatGPT, your audience will likely be able to distinguish automated text from text written by a human. Writing captions with AI is easier—and it may seem like a better option at first—but overall, it's a net loss. Lean into the struggle here: This is a great opportunity to add personality to your caption, ask questions, tell a story, or engage the audience in other ways.

What Next?

I could offer another couple dozen ideas here, but I think you're ready to get moving. As you venture into this wild (and sometimes wonderful) world, here are my parting words for you—and for me.

1. Experiment.

Experiment with different types of content and don't be scared to try something new. You can always review the performance metrics for each post to understand things like reach, engagement, likes, and shares. Just don't be married to those stats. After all, you'll never learn or grow if you don't try some new tricks. Many of them will be complete busts, and that's OK. With social media, you've got to have a short memory—it's an ever-changing world, so get out there and mix it up!

2. Stay consistent.

Like most things in life, consistency is key. People don't want to follow accounts that blitz them with 10 reels in one day, followed by two weeks of nothing. Find your rhythm and don't force yourself to follow anyone else's. It's got to work for your team. In general, I find that it's manageable to post a few reels a week while still maintaining high-quality content. But remember, you can always adjust how

frequently you post as you begin to feel more comfortable creating content. Find your rhythm and go.

3. Have fun!

Social media can be overwhelming at times. At other times, it can be infuriating. But for the most part, it's meant to be entertaining and lighthearted. Don't let your occasional failures (and the internet trolls) keep you from enjoying the ride. Utilize trending audio, add fun filters, and incorporate engaging members from your church. Enjoy the endless creative possibilities that come with social media and have fun!

See you out there (@summitrdu, of course)!
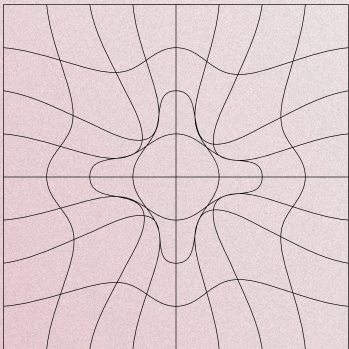
THE ART OF VIDEO PRODUCTION

Let me start with a question: Does your church need video production?

Asking that question may catch you off guard. Perhaps you are thinking, "Of course we need video! This is 2024, for crying out loud; video is everywhere!" Or you may be thinking, "Video actually seems expensive and a total waste of our resources."

To be honest, there's a little truth in both statements—depending on your circumstances.

To help you figure out which is true for you, I want to show you how we approach video at The Summit Church. That's not because our way is the only right way to do it. In fact, I would say there are churches who shouldn't do video at all—yes, even in 2024. Just because anyone can make a video on their iPhone doesn't necessarily mean it's what you need to be doing.

Most of the video content we consume on a daily basis is for entertainment purposes. But the kind of video I'll be talking about in this chapter isn't for entertainment. We're not making the next *SNL* skit to make our church laugh on a Sunday; our goal with the video content we'll be discussing is to inspire and inform. Sometimes, it is possible to do both at the same time. Other times, only one is possible. And sometimes, a video, especially when it's not thought out, ends up doing neither of these things.

What are we inspiring and informing our people with? In short, it's the good news of the gospel: We're pointing them to Jesus. Sometimes, that comes in the form of straightforward information being presented (think of a small group curriculum or an announcement video). Sometimes, it comes in the form of inspiration through storytelling (think of a documentary-style video of a person sharing their testimony, or a sermon bumper setting up what the pastor will be speaking on).

In this chapter, we'll discuss why video is a great medium to accomplish certain goals in your church. But you'll also see that video might not be the best choice for you all the time. Depending on your church's needs and your context, there may be other methods of communication that are better for you. It's important to ask *why* you want a video and what purpose a video will serve. In some cases, it is simply better for your congregation to hear from the person in the pulpit.

Videos can accomplish a lot, but they obviously don't appear out of thin air—they require significant time and resources.

Consider the element of time, for instance. The average "talking head" video of two minutes takes me a minimum of three hours to complete, start to finish. I'm not the only one involved either. When you add everyone else into the process, you're pushing five working hours, all to make a video that lasts 100 seconds.

Five hours may seem long, but that's actually on the quick side. I've been doing this for 13 years, and I was quite a bit slower at it in the beginning. If you have a volunteer or an inexperienced staff member, they might require double or triple the amount of time to complete that same video.

Videos are a strain on resources too. Do you have the financial resources to afford the equipment and the personnel necessary to create a

video—and create it well? If you don't, it might not be the time for you to pull the trigger on this kind of project just yet.

But for the time being, let's say that you've already counted the cost. You have the time. You have the budget. You're ready to use video to communicate with your congregation and relay information quickly and effectively to them.

If that's you, then read on.

In the rest of the chapter, I'll cover: (1) how to set up your project for success, (2) how to film a "talking head" video, (3) how to set up lighting, and (4) some best practices for B-roll.

1. From Pre to Post: How to Set Up Your Project for Success

One of the most important—yet, often overlooked—parts of managing the creation of a video in a church (or in any organization) is learning how to structure the process. You aren't just making a video for fun or for yourself. You're making a video to accomplish a specific goal, and you're almost always doing that for someone else—we'll call them your "client." Your client has ideas and expectations, some of which they may realize, but many of which they don't. A good process can help unearth these expectations. But a video without a process is a recipe for disaster.

What follows is my process for making sure everyone gets what they want (or helping everyone realize what they want) without creating extra work for my team once we have started. Before we do anything else, I share this process with the client so that they know what to expect over the several weeks of the project.

The process of creating a video can be broken down into three parts: pre-production, production, and post-production. Here's how the project looks when broken down into these categories:

A. Pre-production

Step One: Collect Information and Have an Initial Meeting

It's crucial to gather basic information from the client about what they are looking for in the video. Without this information, you are left to assume what the client wants (and you know what they say about assumptions). To get this information, I send a simple Google Form with the following questions. Once I have received their answers, I set up a follow-up meeting to discuss further with them.

Purpose:
- Why are we telling your story?
- What is the name of your project?
- What do you want to tell a story about?
- What inspires you about it?
- What makes this story worth telling?
- If people described your story, what words would they choose?

Target Audience:
- Who is this for?
- Who is this not for?
- What emotion(s) do you want to make people feel as they watch your story?
- What do you want people to do after seeing this (i.e., the call to action)?

Theme:

- What is unique about your story?
- What's amazing about your story?
- What's normal (common or ordinary) about your story?
- What do you think will be the hardest part of telling this story?
- If you had 10 seconds to describe your story, what would you say?
- What values drive the subject or topic of your story?

Aesthetic Style:

- Do you have a visual style in mind?
- Do you have any examples of other videos for inspiration? Please link to them in your answer.
- If there were no budget limitations, how would this story look in your dreams?

Characters:

- Who are the people in your story and how are they involved in it?
- What do you envision them doing in the video?
- Who is the protagonist in your story? This doesn't necessarily need to be an actual person—it could also be a theme, idea, or stigma. Describe them.
- Who is the antagonist in your story? Who or what is at conflict with the protagonist?
- Is there a conflict or challenge involved in the story?
- What negative presuppositions might the viewer bring with them before watching your story that we may need to address?
- Where are you wanting to show your video?
- When are you hoping to have your video finished?

Step Two: Treatment

Once I have received all of the information from the questionnaire and have had a chance to meet with the client, I will develop a "treatment," which is essentially a document that summarizes the video's concept and story. I include written portions that describe the vision, mood, aesthetic style, visual approach, and script, along with reference photos. I then send the treatment to the client to make sure that what I believe we are trying to achieve is what they want to see. In addition to getting the client's sign-off, this is also a great exercise for me because in making the treatment, I become more familiar with the project and can start to flesh out ideas.

Step Three: Script and Storyboard

If a script hasn't already been written, this is when I will either request it from the client, ask someone to write one, or write it myself. Once the script is approved by the client, I will turn it into a storyboard. A storyboard is a visual representation of images (either drawn or made from reference images found online) that shows each shot in a sequence that is in a scene. Once again, I send it off to the client for approval.

B. Production

Step Four: Film

Because of the time we spent in pre-production, the client knows what the end product will look like and so do we. We can now move forward with filming, knowing that we have a firm grasp on what we need to do.

Step Five: Voice-over

If the video requires voice-over work, I will record it during the production phase as well.

C. Post-production

Step Six: Rough Cut #1

Once everything is filmed, I edit and deliver a rough cut to the client for their approval. I like to use websites like Vimeo or Frame.io to do this because the client can leave comments on the video's time code exactly where something needs to be changed.

Step Seven: Rough Cut #2

I make the changes requested from the first rough cut and send an updated link to the client. I make all final adjustments to this version as well—color, sound, etc.—because in my mind, this could be the final cut. I want the client to see what the final cut will look like, while still giving them the opportunity to make changes once more.

I remind the client that this is the last rough cut they will see, and then I ask them to watch it several times. It is important to remind them that this is their last chance to make changes. Trying to make changes to a video once it's in post-production becomes a hassle and dramatically increases the chances of making mistakes.

Step Eight: Final Cut

This is the final version of the video. Once it is sent off to the client, I archive all the files on our video server. If you don't have a video server, you can use a hard drive.

I follow all eight of these steps for every video I do. Sometimes, the steps are quick. Sometimes, they can each take days. But I never deviate from that pattern. I know it sounds regimented, but the structure here all serves a point—keeping the client as involved as possible. It is important to remember that while we are artists, we are ultimately not

making video content for ourselves in the church context (that's what passion projects are for). Our goal is to glorify the Lord with our work and make our videos for the ministry that is requesting them. We are trying to help them achieve their ministry goals. After all, if we make a really cool video but it doesn't accomplish what our church's ministries need, then it wasn't actually a success, was it?

This process has helped me keep great relationships with clients over the years because everyone knows what they can expect from everyone else in the process. They know when they need to provide deliverables. And most importantly, this process gets everyone on the same page, from the beginning of the project to the final cut.

2. How to Film a "Talking Head" Video

One of the most basic videos our church creates is the "talking head" video. You know the one: It's the video where there is one person, or sometimes two, talking directly to the camera, usually to relay information about something. Sometimes, there is B-roll cut in (we'll get to B-roll in a little bit), though often, it's just the person looking into the camera for the entire video.

Talking head videos are effective for a lot of different uses. Sometimes, we make a talking head video with our pastor when he is out of town for a weekend but still needs to address the congregation. Other times, we create talking head videos because the content will live on our website. One of the most effective uses of a talking head video is for announcements. If your services ever run short on time (don't they all?), pre-recorded announcements are an easy way to tighten up the service. It's always nice to have control over the length of the announcements in service.

Whatever your reason for a talking head video, they all follow the same

basic formula I mentioned already: (a) pre-production, (b) production, and (c) post-production. You might think that's overkill. But trust me: These videos look simple, but they really do need all three parts in order to work.

A. Pre-production: The Script

The first time you film with your pastor (or whoever will be in your video), you may be tempted to wing it. Please don't. Having a script written ahead of time is incredibly important. Nine times out of 10, people think they know what they are going to say on camera, but when they go to do it, they stumble. It ends up taking five times longer to film than it would have if they had written it out beforehand.

I can't tell you the number of times that a shoot I was on should have taken eight minutes to film but wound up taking 35 minutes. Why? Two words: no script. Sure, writing a script takes time initially, but it *saves* time while filming. Even more importantly, it saves time when editing. Think about it: When you have 35 minutes of footage to edit instead of eight, your editing time jumps way up—especially when they're 35 bad minutes instead of eight good ones.

The end product is also so much more cohesive when there is a script. The editor doesn't need to figure out what the person on camera is trying to communicate—the script already captures the core idea. So even if you have multiple takes, there is one main idea. When winging it, each take winds up being different. They become harder to cut together because each take has a slightly different flavor.

(Are there exceptions? Yes. I know a small handful of people who become wooden and awkward when given a script. Those people do better with a sparse outline. But they're rare. Start with the assumption that the script is necessary until your subject has proven otherwise.)

Who should write the script? That is completely up to you. Typically,

it's best for the person delivering it to write it as well, because they will write it in their voice. But that's not completely necessary. If you have someone other than the speaker doing the writing, though, it should be someone who is familiar with how that person speaks. Our pastor doesn't always write his own scripts, for instance, but we have a handful of people who know him and his style well enough to write them for him.

One thing to always remember is to *write it like it is being spoken, not read.* For example, sometimes it is smoother to say "It's hot outside," rather than "It is hot outside." Your 4th grade grammar teacher may not be happy about it, but it makes for better videos.

B. Production: The Setup

Once you have your script, you will need time to get your equipment set up. But before you do that, let's talk briefly about what equipment you need. (If you want the deep dive on camera equipment, check out Austin's chapter on gear.) For our purposes here, we'll look at three kinds of equipment—camera, audio, and lighting.

Camera

You will need a camera, a tripod, and a teleprompter.

I recommend filming with a camera that is capable of recording in 4k. When the person on camera messes up (and they will), recording in 4k allows you to edit in HD but have the resolution in the image available to crop in and out. If you want your final video to be in 4k, then you will need to record in 6k or 8k. (I'll get into this more in the next section.)

Your tripod needs to be rated to hold at least the weight of the camera and a teleprompter or you risk it giving out and having a broken camera. I have seen this happen—trust me, it's not pretty. You don't need a

fancy tripod for this kind of video, but you do need a strong one. Don't be cheap here or you'll pay for it (literally) later.

There are lots of teleprompters available out there. My favorite is one with a standalone screen that connects to a computer to control the content. If that isn't an option for you, I would recommend one that holds an iPad. You will need to download software (we use a free app called "Power Prompter") to either your iPad or laptop to present the script on the teleprompter. You will also need to make sure that the software (or the screen on the teleprompter) can mirror the text so that it displays correctly when the on-camera talent is reading it.

Audio

Audio is one of the most important (but often overlooked) parts of video production. It's very important to have a quality microphone to record your on-camera subject. The kind of microphone you use will depend on what kind of inputs your camera has. You can either record with a boom mic or a lavalier mic. Personally, I prefer a boom mic because it is out of the shot. Having a lavalier mic on the subject is easier, but you often see the microphone on them. If you try to hide it, you often end up with a muffled or scratching sound as the mic touches their clothes.

Lighting

The easiest way to light a talking head video is to record in a room that has lots of windows that light your subject. But that isn't always an option. When it isn't, a common technique called "three-point lighting" is an easy way to light your subject. Three-point lighting is exactly what it sounds like: There are three lights. We call them the (1) key, (2) fill, and (3) backlight. You'll arrange them something like the diagram.[1]

1
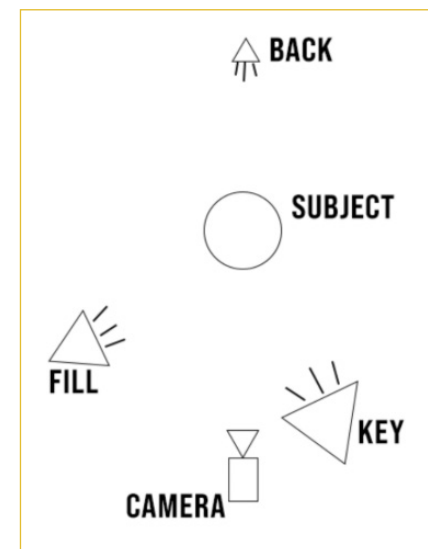
Your key light is set just off-center on your subject. Think of it as your main light source. Once you turn your key light on, you will notice that the other side of your subject's face has some shadows on it.

That's when we bring in the next light, the fill. The fill light isn't as bright as your key light, and it is only used to help bring some of the shadows out of their face, without eliminating them altogether. Think of the fill as "filling in some of the shadows"—but you are really using it to help shape that shadow on their face, which gives their face definition.

Next comes the backlight, which is placed behind the subject and directed at their head. This light shouldn't be too bright, because it runs the risk of making your subject look like an angel (unless that's what you're going for). Mainly, it is used to help create some separation between your subject and the background.

The other thing to keep in mind is that you really want your key and fill lights to be as soft as possible. Using a softbox or shooting through a scrim is the best way to accomplish this. More often than not, your backlight can be a hard light without using any modification, as long as it is dimmed enough.

C. Post-production: The Edit

So you've written your script and filmed your video. Great! Now it's time to edit.

As I already mentioned, you should have shot your video in at least a 4k resolution, with the intention of editing in HD or "1080p." When you open your editing software, you will want to set up your sequences to 1920x1080, then bring your footage in. It will likely look like it is very zoomed in, so you will need to reduce it to 50 percent in size. When your subject makes a mistake and you need to make an edit, you can then bring the next clip to 75 percent or 80 percent, making it look like

you are just cutting to a closer angle. That way, the viewer won't notice the mistake that was made in recording.

When putting the different takes together, you may want to use transitions between audio clips to help smooth out those cuts. And make sure to leave enough room in between cuts to make it seem like your subject is still naturally talking. Otherwise, the illusion of cropping in and out will be lost. The goal is to make it look like your two (or three, or, God help you, 10) takes are really only one take.

3. How to Light an Interview

Whenever I am lighting someone, my goal is to make it look like they aren't being lit by extra lights. To the human eye, I want them to look just like they would in an everyday situation. Unfortunately, cameras aren't as good at capturing light as our eyes are. Even the most expensive cameras don't have the dynamic range that our eyes do. And the cameras that most of us in the church world are using don't even come close, so we've got to help out our cameras by lighting many of our scenes.

Evaluating the Room

The first thing you should do when walking onto a set for your interview is to evaluate the room. The way I do this is by asking myself a ton of questions:

- Where will the subject of the interview be sitting or standing?
- What existing light sources are there?
- Are there windows?
- Where are the windows?
- Is it sunny or cloudy?
- How will the light coming in through the window change while I

am filming, based on the weather and time of day?

- Are there ceiling lights?
- What kind of lights are in the ceiling? LED? Traditional light bulbs? Fluorescent tubes?
- What color temperature is coming from the lights in the room? Are they warm? Cool? Is there a green or magenta hue coming from them?
- Can the lights be turned off? Which ones? Are they on a wall dimmer?

Once you have figured out what situation you are working with, you can start to think of what additional lights you may need to bring in.

Choosing Your Lights

LED lighting has come so far in the past 10 years that, in my opinion, there is rarely a need for anything other than LED fixtures on video sets. This wasn't the case in, say, 2010, but as of 2024, the color accuracy of LED fixtures is good, the brightness is strong, and the price point is affordable. I find there is rarely a need for traditional fixtures with bulbs, especially since they get extremely hot and pull immense amounts of electricity.

Rather than list specific models and brands of lights, I want to talk about the kinds of lights on the market. New models are always coming out, so to list them here would not be helpful. I recommend that you browse B&H Photo Video's website to see the most current lights. We generally rely on brands such as Aputure, Amaran (Aputure's lower line), Godox, Nanlite, or Westcott.

Monolights

Monolights are single source lights that come from one bulb or LED chip. They can be very bright, which is great, but you will never get a

natural-looking scene lit with them without having some kind of mod-ifier (more on that in the next section), because they are very harsh. They are great for bouncing light (again, more on that later) or shoot-ing through silk. If you need to bring a lot of light into someone's living room to combat the brightness of the windows that are in your shot, a monolight is the best way to do that.

Light Panels

Light panels are a flat light source that usually come in varying sizes of rectangles and squares—1'x1', 1'x2', or 2'x2'. Light panels have doz-ens of LED chips inside of them. They are usually accompanied by a frosted piece of plastic to act as light diffusion and are great if you are lighting one or two people in an interview.

Tube Lights

Tube lights are similar to light panel designs, as there are dozens of LED lights in them, but these fixtures are long tubes or strips in lengths of 1', 2', 4', or even 8'. Tube lights are wonderful for lighting a single person when you can get relatively close, or to light a background by putting them on the floor and pointing them up. They don't put out as much light as light panels, but when searching for lights, you can always see how bright they are by the manufacturer's description in LUX output.

So which kind should you choose? It depends on what your needs are—but whatever lights you choose, make sure they are bicolor. And if you can afford it, get RGB as well. Bicolor lights range from tungsten (3200K or orange-ish light) to daylight (5600K or white/blue-looking light). Adding RGB means they can do any color in the rainbow as well, plus they can usually add green or magenta to your light. This is really helpful if you are shooting in a room with fluorescent lighting, which usually contains green undertones.

Shaping and Modifying Your Lights

Before bringing in any extra light, turn on your camera and have the person that you are interviewing sit down. Then, turn off all the overhead lights and lamps. You may turn them back on eventually, but it's best to start without them.

The first light source I always default to is natural light. Almost always, this is the sun coming in through a window. Once you see what that is doing in the room, you can bring in your key light on your subject. To maintain the natural light aesthetic, you will need to use light modifiers such as softboxes, scrims, or bounce cards. These all soften your light to alleviate the shadows they are creating on your subject. Adjust the color of your light to the light temperature in the room. Remember, 3200K is warmer and 5600K is cooler. The sun is close to 5600K, so the light coming in through the window will be somewhere around there (it depends on the cloud cover, what is outside the window, and the colors of the objects inside the room). If there are a lot of trees outside the window, there will be a slight green hue to the window light. If you have an RGB light, you can add a little green in your light to match the outside light.

Depending on the situation, you may or may not need to add a fill light. You want some definition on your subject's face, so you don't want to overdo the fill light. Sometimes, the window will be your fill (or it can sometimes act as your key light). The fill is really just there to get rid of the ugly and undesirable shadows that your key light is creating.

Feel free to use different kinds of lights for your key and fill. If you are using a monolight with a softbox, a 2' tube light could work great as a fill. If you are using a window as your key (and it is very sunny outside), a light panel could work great with diffusion on it. However you choose to combine everything, I would recommend using the same manufacturer for all of your lights. Each manufacturer has different

color science in their lights. If you start mixing and matching brands of lights, you will notice that it is hard to get a consistent color of light between all of them.

If you are able to add a backlight, that's good, but in interviews it isn't always possible. If you are in a studio, you can always mount a backlight to the ceiling—but that's not usually an option in, say, someone's living room.

4. B-roll Philosophy and Best Practices

What is B-roll?

Videos can often be broken down into two types of footage, called "A-roll" and "B-roll." A-roll is your main footage—the thing that drives your video and story. B-roll is there to support it and further the story. Take the example of a testimony video. In a video like this, the interview with the subject would be considered the A-roll, while everything else would be the B-roll.

When making a testimony video, I almost always film the interview and B-roll on separate days—the interview being the first shoot day and the B-roll on a future day (or days). Why? Even though I have a general understanding of what the story is about before the interview, things are often revealed in the interview that aren't in pre-production. I want to have the full story and the time to process it before I go out and film the B-roll. Essentially, the interview footage ends up dictating a lot of what I'd like to see in B-roll.

If possible, I prefer to even have a rough cut of the interview finished before I shoot B-roll, though timing often makes this tough.

When deciding what kind of B-roll to film, I think through these questions:

1. What is the story about?
2. What are they describing at specific points in the video?
3. Can I film what they are describing or do I need to interpret what they are describing into something more abstract?
4. How much time and budget do I have?
5. How much time do I have with the person(s) in the B-roll?
6. Am I allowed to film at the location I want to, or do I need a permit?
7. Are there reference images I can pull from?

Storyboards and Shot Lists

Once I think through those questions, I come up with a game plan. Personally, I like to create a storyboard or shot list as much as I can. I mentioned storyboards earlier: Remember, they are visual representations of images (either drawn or from reference images found online) that show each shot in a sequence that is in a scene.

A shot list is slightly different: It's literally what it sounds like—a list of shots that you will be getting in a scene. You can be as descriptive as you want either visually or verbally, but the main thing is that you are prepared before going into your B-roll shoot.

The storyboard and the shot list aren't for the subject—they're for you. I find a lot of comfort in them, since I'm not great at coming up with ideas during a shoot. But if you are confident enough in your spontaneous filming abilities, you may find you need to lean on them a bit less.

Filming in Sequences

When filming your B-roll, it's important to film shots in sequences that

you can edit together chronologically. The easiest way to do this when starting out is to film the same thing in wide, medium, and tight shots. Once you are comfortable with that strategy, you can get a little more creative.

For example, if you are filming someone going in a door, the first shot could be a wide shot of them walking up to the door. Then, do a close-up of them turning the handle. Finally, end with a shot of them walking through the door, filmed from the inside. Think through how you will edit when you're filming. That way, you can provide your future self with the material you'll want.

Many people think of B-roll as a convenient way to cover up edits in an interview. And it certainly fulfills that function. But more importantly, it is a great way to enhance the storytelling in your videos. When done well, it adds an artistic element that makes the video coherent, engaging, and beautiful.

VIDEOGRAPHY

essential gear

Choosing gear can be one of the more daunting tasks as a filmmaker. There are so many options and so many price points. In fact, no matter your budget, you will never have all the tools you want. (It's a fact; just get used to it now.)

Just because you can't have all the tools you *want* doesn't mean you can't have all the tools you *need*. To choose the right gear, follow these eight principles:

1. Begin with your budget.

This may seem obvious, but you'd be surprised how many people try to ignore it. Your budget creates a set of boundaries for you. Boundaries might seem annoying, but if you ignore them, you're in trouble. Just imagine what would happen if you tried to ignore the boundaries you encounter every day on the road!

Once you recognize your budget limits, you can start making decisions about what the most important pieces of gear are.

Whether your budget is big or small, you can put together a package that matches it. And, with any luck, you can grow that collection over time and over multiple fiscal years.

2. Do all of your research before your first purchase.

Few fields are prone to chasing after all of the newest stuff as videography. But new gear isn't always better—or even good. Before you buy anything, do your homework. Read reviews. If possible, borrow a piece of gear to try it out. You need to prove that the equipment you're ordering really does make a difference in the quality of video you're producing. Then, once you're satisfied it'll make a difference, go for it.

3. Find brands that you trust.

There are a few big-name brands that we like at the Summit. You may save money buying a brand you don't recognize, but you may also just waste your money on a lemon. Recognized brands typically make a quality, reliable product. Here are some of the most common brands we use: Canon, DJI, Rode, Matthews, Impact, Apple, SmallHD, and Manfrotto.

4. Choose a direction and stick with it.

There will always be "the next big thing," as different brands compete to outdo one another. You may be tempted to replace your already really nice camera with another slightly better one. There may be times to make changes like this, but I'd encourage you to do so rarely. Jumping from one item to the next—especially if you're switching brands—is costly and typically unnecessary. For instance, we've chosen to go all-in on Canon's RF lineup. At times, we see what companies like Blackmagic are producing, and we want to go buy all of their new toys. But we've chosen Canon RF and we're sticking to it. All of our lenses will work with all of our cameras. Because of this, we're always going to get a consistent look, which makes our lives so much easier—before, during, and after the shoot.

5. Save where you can.

You don't have to have all of the fanciest things in every category. It's worth investing in some items, like your cameras, lenses, lights, and gimbals. But with many items, "good enough" really is good enough. I'm thinking of items like c-stands, light stands, or cases. Sure, it's nice to have the best of the best, but there are more budget-friendly options that'll get the job done. And for items you rarely use (say, once a year), consider renting.

6. Take great care of your equipment.

This stuff isn't cheap, so don't treat it like it is. Make sure you have adequate storage space so you're not accidentally knocking things over. Put your gear away as soon as you're done using it. Always ask yourself, "Would I like to buy a new one of these today?" If the answer is no (and it almost always is), treat your gear with caution. I'd even recommend saving the boxes if you can. Not only does this provide you with a safe place to store your items, but it also helps recoup a good amount of money if you need to resell it down the road.

7. Look into insurance.

Accidents happen. And when you're working in the church, you may find yourself in situations where volunteers are using equipment. Lay volunteers are fantastic, but they also increase the odds of a busted lens. If you've got some really high-dollar items, protect them so you won't be paranoid the entire time they're being used.

8. Keep meticulous inventory.

The moment you buy a new piece of gear, log it. If possible, you might even consider keeping track of the serial numbers of all of your items. This is much easier to do as you buy things, rather than going back and doing so later.

The DJI Ronin Gimbal

My Favorite Tool: The Gimbal[1]

One of my personal favorite tools for filmmaking is a gimbal. Using a gimbal can really bring a creative look to your videos, especially in a place where you're getting B-roll of a weekend service or a story video. The best thing about using a gimbal is the versatility you get from it.

Once you pick up your gimbal, here are some interesting shots to try:

1. **Smooth and Steady Movement:** The Ronin is a game changer for getting those silky smooth shots. Whether you're walking through the church, following a subject, or capturing a moving scene, the gimbal stabilizes the camera so that your footage looks professional and fluid, not shaky.

2. **Creative Angles and Perspectives:** Experiment with different angles! The Ronin allows for low-angle shots, overhead shots, and everything in between. Imagine capturing a child's baptism from a low angle or a worship session from an elevated view. These perspectives can add a unique touch to your videos.

3. **Tracking Shots:** Want to (literally) follow someone's journey as they walk into the church or share their story? The Ronin is perfect for tracking shots. You can walk alongside or behind a person, which can make for a very engaging look.

4. **Dynamic Transitions:** Use the Ronin to create in-camera transitions. Move from one scene to another by panning smoothly or walking from one room to another. These transitions can make your story flow naturally and keep the viewer engaged.

5. **Reveal Shots:** Start with a close-up and then pull back to reveal the broader setting. (You can also go the other direction, starting broad and zooming in to the specific setting.) Reveal shots are a great way to introduce your viewers to a scene or a subject, adding a sense of anticipation to your story.

6. **Hands-on Fun:** Using the Ronin is just plain fun. It's like having a toy that brings your creative visions to life. Play around with it, try different moves, practice slow and steady push-ins. Then watch it back to see how you could improve your form.

Don't be too hard on yourself as you're learning these moves. They sound and look simple enough, but they require practice. Plus—and few beginners realize this—using a gimbal actually demands a decent amount of physical effort. (If you find yourself sore and annoyed the day after, pull up the footage and have a look. It may help your mood. Then, get some ice.)

It may take time. It may hurt your back a bit. But as you watch yourself grow and improve over time, you'll likely have a hard time leaving the gimbal behind on any shoot.

VIDEOGRAPHY

the edit bay

Depending on your temperament, video editing might be your favorite task in the process—or the moment you always dread. You don't need to love editing, but if you want to excel as a videographer, you need to get used to the edit bay.

Fortunately, editing doesn't have to be as complicated as we often make it. Here are seven steps to make your editing process—and your final video—as smooth as possible:

1. Use the same software.

It's important that the people on your team use the same software, as you'll likely be working on projects together and transferring footage. Trying to manage multiple softwares might be easier in the short run, since everyone can just use the program they're used to. But in the long run, it's a headache you just don't need.

There are many softwares to choose from. Most people use the likes of DaVinci Resolve, Final Cut Pro, or Premiere Pro. I'm familiar with all three, and each one is solid. At the Summit, we use Premiere Pro. This wasn't my first choice (I started with Final Cut Pro), but for the sake of alignment with my team, it was well worth the time to learn the new software.

Learning software can be both challenging and time-consuming, so

make your choice carefully. After all, you're going to be spending a lot of time with this software; start with one you like.

2. Use shortcuts.

Set keyboard shortcuts to your liking to make the editing process go more smoothly and bring people in. I like to have shortcuts for cuts, for labeling clips different colors, for changing the audio levels, and for fast-forwarding through footage—but everyone has preferences and workflows that fit them best.

3. Collaborate well and receive feedback with grace.

Working with multiple people and ministries tends to generate all types of feedback, both wanted and unwanted. Assuming the best about the person giving feedback helps you to stomach it that much better, even if you continue to disagree. In the end, you're all on the same mission.

4. Use subscriptions.

Take advantage of subscriptions like Musicbed, Motion Array, Artlist, or Storyblocks. Just be sure to read their usage clearance rules very carefully so that you're not using someone's work illegally. (It's easier to do than you might think.)

5. Organize, organize, organize.

The secret to a smooth edit is organization. Label, organize, mark, name—whatever suits you. Just have a system, a process, and a struc-ture. Don't let your folders and timeline become a mess. It makes ev-

erything harder. Take the time to do the boring work at the beginning and you'll thank yourself later.

Our folder structure is simple. We quite literally have a folder in "Finder" on our computers that is labeled "Folder Structure." Inside, you'll find this layout:

01_Video

02_Audio

03_GFX

04_Project Files

05_Exports

06_Photos

We copy and paste this into each project before we do anything else. So let's imagine that we just filmed baptisms on Easter. This is what you would see:

This helps us all find anything we need very, very quickly.

No confusion, no fuss.

Once we've got everything in those folders, we'll start a new project in Premiere and save the file to (wanna guess?) "04_Project Files." That way, anytime Premiere autosaves, it is updated right there, where it should be.

Inside the project in Premiere, we like to do a similar layout with what

Premiere calls "bins." Bins are essentially Premiere's term for folders. To find "bins," just right click and select "Create new bin." Your screen should look like this:
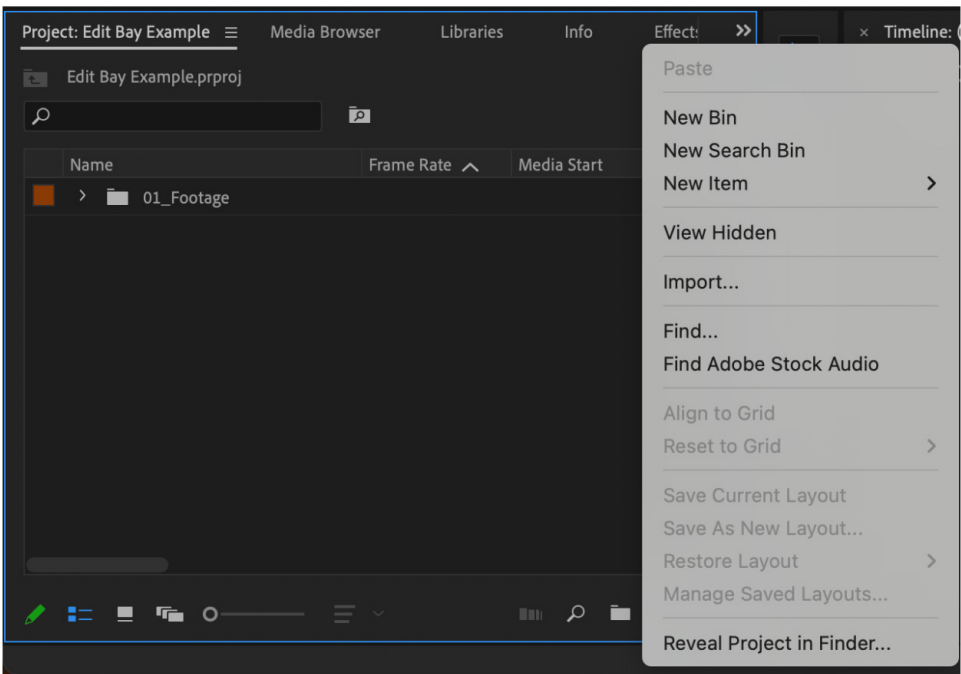
Inside those bins, we'll label things further, including which camera the footage came from, or splitting out sound effects from instrumentals in the audio folder. Essentially, we like to keep the labeling so obvious that even our boomer parents could find what they were looking for. (Love you, Dad!)

6. Master the nuts and bolts of editing—sequences, music, effects, and color.

Once you've gotten everything organized, you're finally ready to edit. Editing is where you have the most freedom to choose your own path. I'm not exaggerating when I say that every videographer I know does

it differently. If you were to ask any of our team members their process for this, you'd get a different answer from each one. Ask them all a few weeks later and you might get even *more* new answers.

Even though editing is pretty variable, I default to one simple process—structuring my **sequences**. Sequences can be created in Premiere by going to "selected sequence" (in the upper left-hand corner) and then choosing "create new sequence."

Think of sequences as the timeline that your video will live on. All of your footage, audio graphics, and anything else that you want to end up in the final product should be on the sequence. I like to make two sequences: one sequence with all (or most) of the footage and one sequence that is clean, which will be the final "edit." I'll cull the footage, bring it into "the edit," add my music, color it, and add effects, logos, graphics, or lower thirds.

Let's talk about **music** selection. The key here is to select the music you want to use *before* you begin editing. This helps set the tone in your mind as you select clips and make cuts.

If you need **effects**, logos, or graphics, again: Get them lined up *before you start using them. Be sure that you have all the information that you can for the branding,* including color codes and fonts. Pay attention to the text here, specifically: You'll want to make sure you have the correct spelling of names and titles, which is easy to skip.

Color is typically the last thing that I finalize. Everything else can change and shift up until the end, but you don't want to adjust the color more than once, so wait to do it at the end. That way, you can focus on those tweaks and adjustments and get the color exactly how you want it before exporting.

7. Export!

Don't ignore the importance of this step. For exporting, you should know some settings that will have an effect on the quality. We like to export using the following: H.264; selecting maximum render quality; highest quality possible; CBR; 30 Mbps target bit rate. (If you don't know what that means, you probably shouldn't be exporting a video.)

Those are our standard specs, but we'll change them slightly depending on the type of video. For instance, if we're using a high-quality LED wall, we use ProRes instead of H.264.

Here are a couple of screenshots showing the export specs:
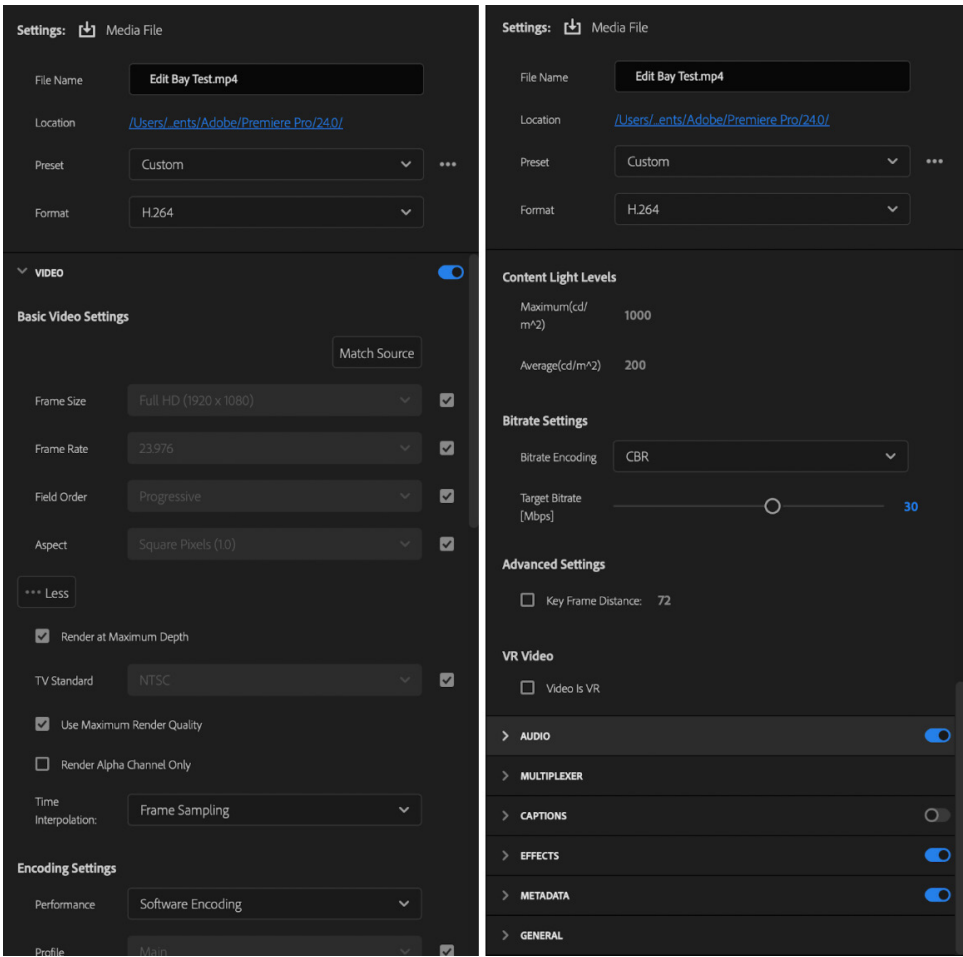
One last thing: Remember that even if you have all of the nicest gear and every subscription that you can find, you still have to tell a story. The edit bay is where raw material becomes a story worth watching. So invest in yourself, learn as much as you can, and don't be afraid to welcome feedback. The journey of storytelling is one that we're all on. Every single person that ever lived has a story to tell; we choose to tell ours through the medium of video. So learn it, craft it, perfect it—and make it your own.

One last thing: Remember that even if you have all of the nicest gear and every subscription that you can find, you still have to tell a story. The edit bay is where raw material becomes a story worth watching. So invest in yourself, learn as much as you can, and don't be afraid to welcome feedback. The journey of storytelling is one that we're all on. Every single person that ever lived has a story to tell; we choose to tell ours through the medium of video. So learn it, craft it, perfect it—and make it your own.

GRAPHIC DESIGN AS PROBLEM-SOLVING

Jason Mathis, Art Director

In 2011, I was volunteering at my church's "Next Steps" table. I had already been working there for about two years. Volunteers for an upcoming event were instructed to pick up their volunteer shirts from the Next Steps table one Sunday. Since the event was a community outreach program, I had been instructed to design a shirt that included the tagline, "What if Everyone Mattered?" The sentiment was intended to make people think about how they currently, in the words of Scripture, "love [their] neighbor as [themselves]" (Leviticus 19:18).

I was a new designer with an idea for how I could add some spice to this particular shirt. I decided to change how the text would read by dividing up the lines in a somewhat confusing manner.[1]

Some of my coworkers expressed hesitation. But I reassured them that it would be a conversation starter, as everyone who saw the shirt would take a second look to figure out what it said. "It will be a walking invitation to our church," I said.

While we were distributing the shirts, an older member walked up to the table and, looking at the shirt, proclaimed in a somewhat disgusted manner, "Why does the shirt look that way? I can't read it." The only explanation I could muster was that it was a design decision meant to start a conversation. She wasn't buying that.

The mistake I had made was putting my own personal design aesthetic before the very people that I was hired to produce art and design for.

1

WHAT IF EVERY ONE MA TTERED?

I had forgotten what a forest looks like because I had spent too much time looking at individual trees.

The Paradox: Graphic Design as Vocation vs. Graphic Design as Problem-solving

There is a paradox inherent in all art: Should artists create something for art's sake or for the sake of others? Is art primarily a matter of personal fulfillment and vocation (*I am called to do this because it speaks to me*) or of problem-solving (*I need to fix this problem for myself and others*)? I believe the best art manages to keep both ends of that paradox together.

We already expect this kind of paradox, for instance, when it comes to preaching. The task of the preacher begins with necessity. It is, in other words, a problem-solving venture: *These people need to hear God's Word being taught.* But good preaching also incorporates the specific gifts given to the preacher by the Spirit. If the preacher only says what "speaks to him," the preaching will be thin. But if the preacher never allows his personal aesthetic to shine through, the preaching will be flat.

So it is with design. I believe that the artist is called to create because it's what God has called him to do. It is a vocation. For this person, all of their skill and desire point to the need to make things that are pleasing to God, that reflect what is good, true, and beautiful—and yes, what the artist himself finds appealing. However, this must be balanced with a sense of the needs of the specific group to which the artist is called. Again, in the same way that a skilled preacher is called to speak the Word of God *in a specific context,* so the artist is called to create *within a specific context.* In the same way that a good preacher will determine the needs of the community in order to deliver messages that speak to the hearts and minds of the people, so a good artist will

temper his own need to create with a knowledge of how to best serve the people around him.

How can an artist strike a balance between these two paradoxical realities? By listening. In Exodus, for instance, God instructed Moses on how to construct the tabernacle and endowed Bezalel and Oholiab with the wisdom and skill to carry it out. Bezalel and Oholiab did not embellish the tabernacle with anything *beyond* God's instructions. But the instructions were not so detailed as to act as an exact blueprint; they still had to bring their skill and wisdom to the task. The more closely they listened to God's words, the greater their ability to see what was allowed—and what wasn't. This served both God and his people, showing the care and attention that God has even for things created by members of his creation. As designers and artists in the church, we have a calling to create like Bezalel and Oholiab did—with freedom *and* within parameters. God has given us guardrails, not stop signs. We do our best work when we know what we're creating, why we're creating it, and what the needs of the people around us are. When we understand all this, our art may help people truly and freely worship God without distractions or stumbling blocks.

Design as Problem-solving

I learned a lot through my mishap with the "Everyone Mattered" T-shirt. But I couldn't quite articulate those lessons until I watched the Netflix documentary series *Abstract: The Art of Design*. In that documentary, Nike designer Tinker Hatfield stated, "For me, as a designer, it is not the ultimate goal to become self-expressive. The end goal is to solve a problem for someone else, and hopefully it looks great to someone else." That was it. I had been prioritizing my personal expression as an artist—not a bad thing—but had missed something important: the people I was serving. Art in the church, I learned, is ultimately not about

me as an artist, but about solving the problems of the community within which I am creating.

What kinds of problems are designers in the church asked to solve? Here are some of the most common: helping people find their way from one point to another, labeling the doors in your building, putting some kind of information on a screen or handout, or designing a banner for your front entrance. When these needs aren't seen primarily as problems to be solved, the results are typically mixed at best. Many times, the outcome becomes purely pragmatic, something like, "We need a banner, so see what you can find that another church has done" or "We need signs to mark a door—just print something out from Microsoft Word." There's nothing wrong, necessarily, with a pragmatic approach. It might get the job done. But even in a best-case scenario, such an approach will not allow those in the congregation with visual arts gifts to exercise those gifts. At worst, you may be settling for art and design that is ugly, ultimately detracting and distracting from the beauty of the church. When design is seen as a solution to a problem, the outcomes can be not only pragmatic but also creative, because more options are being weighed and considered.

On the flip side, art that is created purely for the sake of the artist (as a symbol of their self-expression) can have a detrimental effect upon the church. The art becomes self-focused and may not be the best solution to an actual problem. No artist, after all, needs to express themselves through signage. Signage is simply about wayfinding. That doesn't mean that the artist should sacrifice care when creating the sign; it's just that it's not a great medium for self-expression. Ultimately, that sign serves a larger purpose than the expression of the artist: It's serving the congregation in an extremely practical way.

When you approach design through a problem-solving lens, the end result is greater clarity. And clarity in design can go a long way toward

helping people feel comfortable and giving them a sense of belonging, since there's no barrier to being a part of the group.

There Are No Private Languages

The way I've thought about this in my own life is through the lens of philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's idea about private languages. Wittgenstein believed that there can be no language that only one person knows and speaks. On the surface, this sounds intuitive. But consider what he's saying: Language is ultimately a communal product. Words and their meanings are derived from usage and agreed-upon definitions. The meaning of ideas and sentences can be verified by other individuals in the community. There are also external rules that govern the language and ensure that usage is accurate and that communication is actually occurring.

We tend to understand Wittgenstein's point—even if we aren't as philosophical about it—when it comes to language. But in art, we find the same dynamic at play. Visual art, and design in particular, is a communal product. It is reliant upon certain rules being followed and upheld as good for a specific community. The group ultimately needs to "understand" the work for it to have any impact, be it positive or negative. The last thing that a designer on a church staff should be creating is work that doesn't communicate anything. If the only person that "gets" the design is the designer, that piece of art has become a private language—which is to say, an unhelpful piece of art.

The Proper Place for Self-expression

Clearly, I have problems with designers in a church context leaning too much on their desire to be artists and create great art for art's sake.

A This T-shirt design (created for our college ministry by Tally Schiro) is an example of a more complicated artistic style.

B This T-shirt design (created by me for a volunteer ministry at one of our campus locations) is an example of a more straightforward design style.

There is, however, room for self-expression. It just has to be in its proper place, taking the audience into consideration. If the artist is creating art with no consideration for the audience, over time a quiet stalemate develops, where the artist is left wondering why no one understands their work and the audience (in this case the congregation) believes that the artist is trying to trick them by creating work that they just "don't get." Neither outcome is ideal.

The solution is for the artist to consider three factors: (1) what style of art they work most naturally in, (2) what style of art allows them to produce the best work they can, and (3) what the audience needs. Maybe the community needs a style of art that is simple and straightforward, rather than a challenging style that pushes the artist's sensibilities too much. (If so, the artist should bend that way.) Maybe the community is in a cultural setting where more complicated artistic expression is expected and where something simple would be seen as lazy. (If so, even if the artist prefers a subtle style, he should bend toward the audience's expectations.) Again, we come back to the idea of listening. Listening to and understanding your audience is perhaps the most important step to help incorporate effective problem-solving into the graphic design of your local church.

The Drummer: Practice Participation in Your Art

There is a YouTube page called Drumeo, where professional drummers are invited to add a drum part to a song that they haven't heard before and that has the drum part removed. The drummer is being asked to be creative within their skillset as a drummer and not as a member of a particular band. What's interesting is that all of the drummers manage to add compelling drums to the existing songs. Sometimes, they even come close to the original drum part. What I like about the videos, and what I believe the point of the channel to be, is this: Any drummer can add something interesting to a song, but what makes a song memora-

ble is the interplay of several people working together to create something beautiful and uniquely their own. Ultimately, what we as listeners would consider "correct" is tied to the original version of the song. The new version is fine, but it's always missing something that made the original special.

When it comes to design in the church, the "correct" part you play is connected to a particular group of people making "the song." The Drumeo drummers add something, but they add it in a vacuum. They're playing along to a song, rather than participating in it. Artists in the local church should be participating in the song that the church is creating, not merely "playing along." Art and design in the church are always better when the designer can determine the song being created and join in on that creation as it's happening. As a designer, I want to "sing" the same song as my local congregation, which is singing the same song as a particular group of evangelicals. Following the logic far enough, every version of orthodox Christianity is singing the song given to us by the ancient church and by Jesus himself. The artistic act of creation is enlivened by participation.

As a designer, my vocation is not about me and my expression. It's about helping the ministries of my church share the gospel and love people as best they can, and I do that by participating.

A Quick Aside: What About the Artist as Prophet?

I want to make clear that I am not advocating for art that is subservient to the agendas of denominations or megachurches. I believe designers in the church should lean toward their audience, not completely cater to that audience. Throughout history, and still today, artists have often functioned as a prophetic witness and a voice crying out for change. Just as a good preacher will sometimes confront and challenge his congregation, so also a good artist will know when it is time to be more

prophetic. What is important is that the artist does this intentionally, not flippantly.

Solve Their Problems, but Don't Always Be Literal

One last note: Sometimes, I think it would be easy to only ever create what makes the most literal sense to an audience. Easy, but not terribly effective, and here's why: In a church context, the audience for any particular piece of design or art is incredibly broad. It isn't like a market segment for a commercial company; ultimately, the group a church is appealing to is more diverse than what most companies are dealing with. For that reason, it is sometimes important to not just be practical and literal with your approach as far as how you appeal to that audience.

This is most evident in how you promote the church's programs. As an example, consider the screen graphic created for our college ministry (fig. C).

One way of looking at this image would be to think, "Hold on, we aren't sending college students anywhere like this." This would be true, of course, but would also miss the point. Here, the goal was to create an emotional response (wonder, excitement, maybe even a little fear balanced with hope—all things college students already feel), not elicit a logical response to an image of literal college students on a literal mission trip. The sense of what's possible is more important than a literal presentation of reality.

Practical Problem-solving

The following are two examples from my time as a designer in a church context. Each example illustrates the importance of holding both sides

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of the artistic paradox—designing with an audience in mind without sacrificing quality and adherence to design principles and trends.

Example 1: MLK 50
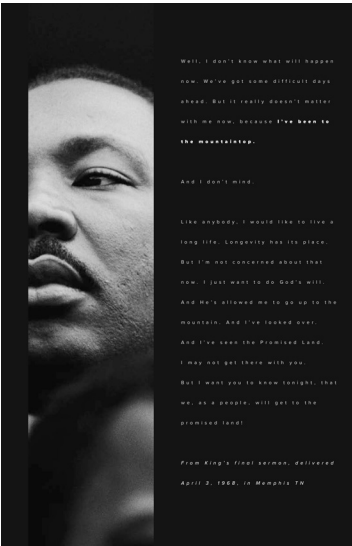
Front

Back

Interior

In 2018, for the 50th anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, our church wanted to produce a printed piece in observance of his life. I chose black and white for the color palette, to show the stark reality of racial violence and the effect of racism on the soul of a person. Even though we were celebrating Dr. King's life, it seemed important for everything to be as stark as possible. For this reason, I also chose to have the interaction of the photography and the typography be relatively minimal.

The resultant "MLK 50" piece is laid out almost like a newspaper. The front cover features a cropped image of King, not only for visual impact but also to highlight the fact that this is a piece about what was, in many ways, an incomplete life. His "incomplete" face hints at that truth, whether our people make that connection or not.

The text on the cover was from King's final sermon, "I've Been to the Mountaintop," a fitting summary for American Christians of his life and death, reflecting back on the previous 50 years. It was important to me to not use the text from the "I Have a Dream" speech from the March on Washington five years earlier. In addition to being overused (and therefore likely to be ignored) as a symbol for King's life, "I Have a Dream" didn't have the same impact as the "Mountaintop" sermon quoted. Plus, we were marking the date of King's assassination, and the "Mountaintop" sermon was literally the day before his death.

We didn't want to skimp on the price, so we chose a thick cardstock and made the final product rather large, an 11x17 folded piece. Not only the color, but the material and size itself were dramatic and stark. Ultimately, all of these individual choices were made as a way of showing our church the importance of King's life, his ministry, and the impact he made on both the American church and the entire nation.

Example 2: "Multiply" Newspaper

Our church regularly does a sermon series on giving (usually once a year). So for this particular handout, associated with a giving series, we wanted to shy away from just highlighting the financial request. If you make a big deal out of a financial request too often, people tend to tune it out.

As a creative team, we asked ourselves, *How can we show the spiritual benefits of generosity without merely asking for a financial commitment?* We settled on a newspaper, which would allow us to make something impactful without appearing costly. (The issue of cost was important because of the generosity series itself: People could easily infer that we were being wasteful if we created something that looked too expensive.)

Cover

Spread #1

Spread #2

The contents of the newspaper highlighted different ways that the church uses donations, particularly in our local outreach and missions ministries.

For the spreads, I needed a way to make articles of varying lengths fit without too much white space. (Unlike other mediums, too much white space in a newspaper would look sloppy and unintentional.) To solve this problem, I decided to allow the grid of each page to change slightly, narrowing or widening the column of text where needed and adding a pull quote off to the side to fill the space and add some visual interest. I wanted it to be engaging without losing its newspaper essence.

When we did introduce financial content at the end of the paper, I decided to place it next to the biblical text that we had been using throughout the series, in order to balance the worldly need for money with the spiritual need for God's love and guidance.
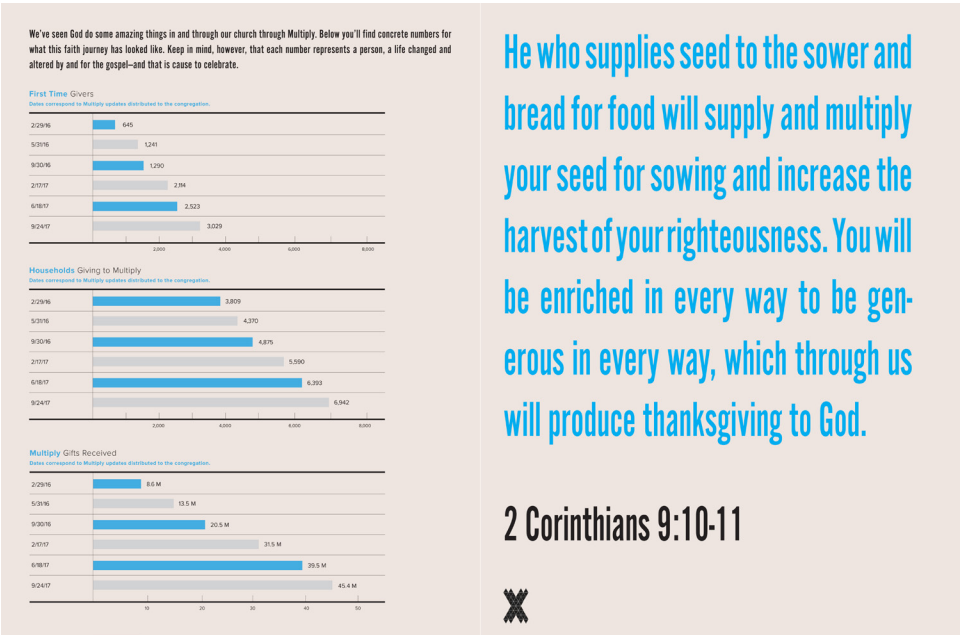
Spread #3

Conclusion: Engaging Artists and Designers in the Local Church Context

The church has many people who desire to serve God through their gifts of creativity. The challenge, many times, is figuring out a way to encourage and enable these people to use their gifts in the church context. I believe part of the solution is what I have outlined here: a vision of art in the church that combines (1) the artistic task as vocation with (2) serving the congregation through artistic problem-solving.

Ultimately, the church doesn't need to be a place where artists work out their own personal visions of artistic creativity; neither does it need to stifle that creativity in the name of practicality. An artist really just wants to serve and use the gifts that God has given them. My hope is that more churches will create space, both practically and spiritually speaking, for creative people to work and grow and serve their community.

THE CREATIVE JOURNEY IN CHURCH DESIGN

No matter the capacity in which you serve in your local church, it is an opportunity to be amazed by what the Lord can truly do. Dreaming of what we have not yet seen and seeing it become something far greater than we imagined turns the local church into the best development ground for any God-given gift.

Design is a gift and a tool that the Lord uses to beautify his bride, the church. We acknowledge that Jesus is the center of attraction, and as we design, our goal is not to replace him but to point toward him.

From Genesis, we see the astonishing character of God as the Creator. Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." God's first recorded action is in essence an act of design, creating the heavens and the earth from scratch.

None of us has ever done anything like this. We can't create something from nothing, like God did. So if we were to look at the Genesis 1:1 world, our verdict would be, "Excellent." It's miraculous and impressive. But that's not God's first impression. Look at what Genesis 1:2 says: "The earth was formless and empty." The inventor of everything we see recognized that his work was incomplete.

God could have created the entire package in the blink of an eye; he is God, after all. But he chose not to. He chose to take his time and enjoy the process.

If this doesn't amaze us, the author goes even further in verse 2, saying, "Darkness was over the surface of the deep." In other words, God's creation was not at all attractive. For any artist, this point could be the downfall of their attempt to create. I know it has been for me. The creative vision begins with such energy, but the first attempts often seem like "darkness."

And yet, despite seeing all that chaos, God was not intimidated or dismayed: "The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (v. 2). Incredible! God is not afraid of creative chaos. His first brushstroke does not define his final work. On the contrary, he looks with patience on his dark, incomplete, empty creation, and *he keeps moving*. The Spirit of God, after all, was not static; he was *moving*. He never stopped the plan. He persevered and kept his eye on his work, always thinking about his next stroke.

As a designer, I think of Genesis 1:1–2 often. God wasn't afraid of creative chaos, and because of that, I am no longer afraid of chaos either—because the same Spirit who was hovering over the chaotic waters in Genesis 1:2 is in my soul, giving me direction, reminding me that what I do isn't about me in the least, but about him and his glory.

The Design Process: Complementing the Message

The creative process for designing any digital visual element for a congregation begins with a deep understanding of God's mission for his church and the context where the Lord has placed it. It is essential to know the central message that our ministries want to convey, as well as their needs and expectations. This knowledge translates into a series of visual concepts, which together deliver a clear and compelling message. The message isn't just about words: Colors, typography, and graphic elements are all carefully chosen, because they are part of the message too.

One of the most important aspects to consider is ensuring that the graphic supports are aesthetically coherent with the existing architecture and decoration of the church. This means designing elements that not only look good on their own but also blend seamlessly with the physical environment. The goal is to create designs that complement and enhance the spiritual experience of the congregation, rather than distract from it.

For example, when creating banners, signs, or even T-shirts, all of the colors, fonts, and overall style should reflect and respect the church's existing decor and architectural features. This integration helps maintain a unified and reverent atmosphere that supports the church's mission and values.

Designing for the Congregation: One Musical Note in a Larger Symphony

Something that is not easy to navigate is when we design based on our experience—which most of us tend to do. It's not bad to begin with your experience, but it can create frustrations. On many occasions, for instance, I've pursued my own ideas, designs that I really liked, which were heavily influenced by the bundle of my cultural background, my habits, my tastes, and countless other personal elements—but I forgot about the congregation. The end result was a piece of design that I liked but that ultimately, didn't work.

It is essential to know the people in your church. How do they think? How do they usually receive information? What do they already know? What is new for them? The more you know about your church—your audience—the more you can begin to use your own experience in a helpful, rather than frustrating, way.

At The Summit Church, for instance, communication is mostly digital—

whether on screens on the weekend, social media apps, or our website. Most of the informative content is distributed through these means. So when I think of design, I don't think of a piece of printed paper as my final goal. I think of all of the digital spaces where my design will live: My elements must be intentionally distributed so that the concept is a body with greater reach.

Here's how our process works: We begin with a mission—starting a new series, or a specific event, or a celebration, or a conference.

Once we have the mission, we adjust the details—find the target audience and identify the time, the spaces, and the materials.

Once we have the mission and the details, I can start brainstorming.

For the designer, it is important to know these details as well as possible, because this will become our base point to develop the visual strategy. But it's also important to recognize that sometimes you need to create with some blank spaces in the plan. This might make you panic. But remember the pattern of God: Chaos isn't something to be feared; it's something that can be worked through. As long as you know the "what" and the "why," you can play with the "how."

As a designer, I consider my work as the equivalent of a passing note in a musical composition. In music, a "passing note" is a note that is not part of the main chord but acts as a bridge or connection between two notes of the chord. Similarly, when an initial idea arises, it is common for that idea to not be fully developed. It lacks certain essential elements. Those waiting to execute this idea often have an expectation and are in a different tuning than those who initially conceived it.

This is where the creative process comes into play. This process acts as the connection between both sides. We play the passing note, allowing the melody to keep moving. Our role is to take the original idea and

adapt it in a way that is understandable and useful for those who will receive and continue developing it.

The Fun Begins Here: The Story Behind the Project, "The Book of Daniel: Shining in Babylon"

All of this will make a lot more sense if I show you how it works in the context of a real project.

Let's go step by step through the design process I followed for the sermon series titled, "The Book of Daniel: Shining in Babylon."

1. Define the Project

Here, we developed the objective, scope, and target audience. This step becomes almost automatic as you get to know your audience so well that you have them in mind even before you begin. But it's crucial not to skip this step; most incoherency in church design comes from people rushing through this early stage.

Here was the objective, scope, and target audience for this series:

- **Objective:** Create an image that helps the congregation connect with the story of the book of Daniel and its most relevant events.
- **Scope:** Identify the mediums through which the graphic design will be reproduced. In our case, we used LED screens of various sizes, our website, YouTube, social media, mailing, T-shirts, and brochures. (Not every series uses all of these. This was a big one!)
- **Target Audience:** The Summit Church/Summit en Español

2. Research and Analysis

At the Summit, we have a dedicated team that compresses information into simple concepts so the foundation is not lost and can be translated into digestible images. This team saves us from having to do all of
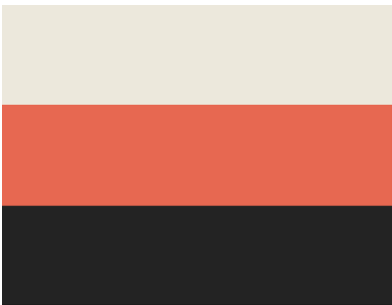
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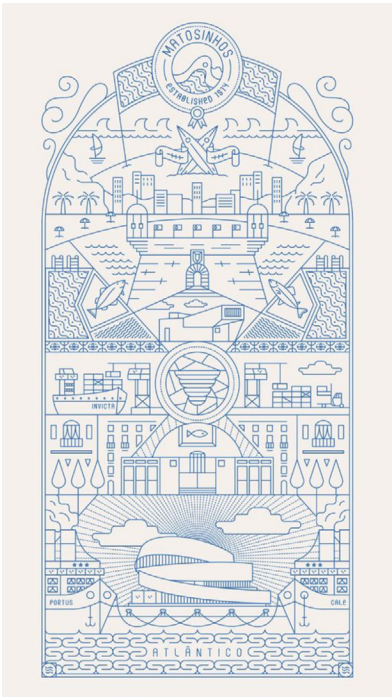
B

C

the research on our own. Once I receive this information, I start contextualizing the idea with graphic trends, shapes, colors, and fonts that support the main objective.

Here were the choices we made for the book of Daniel:

- **Graphic Style**
  - **Inspiration:** Finding inspiration on design platforms is very helpful. It not only opens your mind but also challenges you to merge your initial idea with more complex ones, which can later be translated into additional resources for future designs.
  - For the design for the book of Daniel, I was intrigued by "line art", as in figure A.

- **Fonts:** Choosing a legible font is important, especially since it will be visible on-screen during services for at least 45 minutes. Using a hard-to-read font would create distraction and frustration.
  - **Chosen Font:** Corsica (figure B). This font was clear and legible but still looked "old," which seemed fitting for an Old Testament book.

- **Colors:** Our rule of thumb is to have three contrasting base colors: one dark color, one light color, and one complementary color. This doesn't mean that you can't add more, but establishing a solid base speeds up the creative process.
  - **Chosen Colors:** Charcoal, orange, and beige (figure C).

3. Design Development

Format: For the development of a series design, I first think about a popular screen format (16x9), a common horizontal format that works well on digital platforms. Although most of our Summit campuses have a main screen that is 2200 x 800, it's better to think about the predom-

inant format first and then adapt it to others, rather than designing for specific formats that may not be adaptable (figs. D and E).

Sketch: I know it may be tempting to skip this step, but I find it very useful to define the framework. In my case, I don't create very elaborate sketches; I simply outline the parameters I'm going to follow. I make sure there is harmony and spaces for rest, and that the text is placed in visible areas and in considerable sizes. Beyond having the final design, it's like a foggy window—as you clean it, the image seen through the window gradually becomes clearer (fig. F).

Digitalization: Regardless of the graphic style you decide to use, 50 percent of your design will depend on choosing the most appropriate software for its development. My design was based on very geometric lines, and a tablet would not have helped me achieve the precision needed for each stroke. Photoshop would have been cumbersome, requiring me to select each layer for every change. In my case, Illustrator was the most suitable (fig. G).

Naming: Starting right ensures that you finish right. Naming and organizing your design into layers will not only speed up your design process, but also allow anyone who receives the editable file to understand what you were designing and continue with your idea. Disorganization in design is frustrating; it limits your ability to see details and can lead you to discard good ideas. No one wants to move a tree leaf by leaf, branch by branch, when they can carry it by the trunk. Understanding the creative structure of your design will make you much more efficient and meticulous.

4. Feedback

Once your design is nearing completion, it's important to share it with a diverse group of people. Show it to those who love visual aesthetics

D

E

F

G
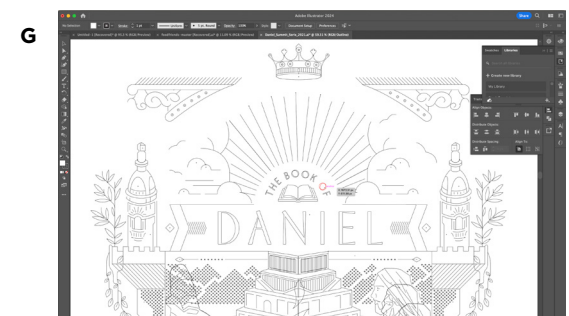
and those who don't have much interest in design. Their feedback will be invaluable in ensuring your concept is clearly understood.

(Keep in mind that abstract ideas often need time and repetition to be fully appreciated, so they're best suited for long-lasting graphics. If your design is for something more short-term—like a one-time event— be clearer and more direct with your visuals.)

Feedback is crucial. It helps you not only improve your interpretation skills but also helps you know your audience better. Understanding how people perceive your work will make you more effective in future projects and enhance the quality of your designs.

Remember, my experience may differ from yours, but hopefully this advice serves as a helpful guide. Strive to execute what God has given you through design in a way that honors him in all aspects. That's our true measure of success.

HOW TO DO SERMON RESEARCH ON A SHOESTRING BUDGET

If you're reading this, I'm going to assume a few things about you:

1. You regularly preach sermons.
2. You would like help making those sermons better.
3. You would love to have a dedicated team of people to help you, but you don't. You don't even have one full-time person. Or even one part-time person. But you're on the hunt for someone.

What follows is the process I've implemented for finding that someone—and using them well. You won't be able to match our process step for step, so feel free to adapt this to your context. Pick up what's useful and leave behind what's impossible.

Five principles:

1. Find your resident genius(es).

What you're really looking for is a person—or, if you're lucky, a few people—to help with sermon research and sermon feedback. I'm calling them "geniuses" because that's what I call mine.[1] Plus, if you flatter people, they are more likely to work for free.

In looking for your resident genius, prioritize these four things:

1. **Biblical knowledge –** They know their Bible pretty well. A good researcher can screen out useless or incorrect stuff, bringing

[1] This is an idea I initially got from Ed Catmull and the crew at Pixar. They have feedback groups they call the "Brain Trust" to help them with all of their movies. Same idea, different name.

you a better product. Plus, they'll have more helpful insight on what you're preaching.

2. **Communication –** A lot of people know the Bible well but communicate this knowledge in ways that put people to sleep. If you can, find someone who also has the ability to teach in a winsome way.

3. **Availability –** The most insightful person in the world won't do you much good if they're tough to reach or they don't know your context well. Almost always, you're better off having someone *within* your church help you, rather than looking for help from the outside.

4. **Humility –** In this role, you're asking someone to find you great material—or even *come up with* great material—and then be completely content with you rejecting it. Or, even worse, *using* that material without them ever getting credit. For that to work, your resident genius needs to be a person of humility.

If you can find someone who combines these four things, you're in business—even if they only have five hours a week to spare. Aim for at least two out of four.

One important note here: A seminary degree might help, but it's not required. I've got two seminary degrees, so I'm not categorically against them. But I've worked on teams with folks who have seminary training and those who don't. Both can work.

Cast a wide net here, and don't be surprised if the person you are considering doesn't immediately strike you as a "research kind of person." In my experience, there is no such thing. You may decide to go with a stay-at-home mom or a college kid. It might be a part-time staff member or a lay leader. (For the record, it's not likely to be your wife. Not recommended.)

2. Collect a list of go-to sermon gurus.

It's not cheating to hear how other people have preached a passage. It's humble. Just know that there's a noticeable difference between parroting Tim Keller and being influenced by him. Listen to enough Tim Keller to figure out the difference.

Pastor J.D. has his own list of go-to gurus, split into three tiers. It's always evolving, but it helps us know where to start when we're researching. Remember, you're short on time, so don't waste it by searching 50 different preachers' sermons.

Pastor J.D.'s list (which we've included at the end of this chapter) isn't necessarily a collection of those who preach most like him. Neither is it a list of those he thinks are the best preachers. It's a collection of communicators *who help him as he prepares to preach.*

Some of these folks are on our list because they consistently provide great opening illustrations—and that's about it. Others are on here because they give great historical detail. Others make biblical narratives come alive. Others spark ideas about framing the message. Some are close to the total package. But all of them serve a purpose.

Don't worry about somebody finding your list and judging you for it. No one is going to grade your orthodoxy based on this list. (Just make sure you actually *are* being orthodox as you preach.)

You've got our permission to start with Pastor J.D.'s list. But don't feel the need to copy it wholesale. Some of these folks won't help you at all, just like some of the folks you'll end up finding wouldn't help J.D. at all.

3. Have your resident genius outline your gurus' sermons.

Every week, before Pastor J.D. preaches, I present to him a list of sermon outlines from his go-to gurus. It's usually about four or five outlines, along with my high-level commentary on all of them. You probably won't have the ability to get all that, but if you've found the right genius (Step 1) and identified your list of go-to sermon gurus (Step 2), you can get close.

Before you begin your next series, have your researcher find out which of your go-to gurus has preached on the book of the Bible you're covering. Once they collect that list, tell them which sermons you want outlined and when. Most of the time, they'll enjoy the process, because you're telling them to listen to a great sermon by a stellar preacher.

It's up to you how you want the sermons outlined. I've included a version of how Pastor J.D. likes his outlined, just to give you an idea. It's rarely more than three pages, has the main points clearly marked out, and captures all the highlights of the sermon. Granted, it looks a bit bizarre, with three different colored fonts (black, red, and blue), and I don't necessarily recommend that pattern.[2] But find the pattern you want and make sure your resident genius knows what it is.

4. Have your resident genius—AND your staff team— offer you real-time sermon feedback.

Most pastors know they need help researching their sermons. Very few realize just how valuable it can be to have someone offer feedback *while they're writing* their sermons. But this is one of the most strategic things you can ask your resident genius to do.

And not just your resident genius either. Ideally, gathering real-time sermon feedback is something you can do *with your staff team*. It's like

2 The colors aren't random, though. The black font is our baseline. The red font indicates anything that is more exegetical and related to the text (e.g., "In Greek, this word literally means …"). The blue font indicates anything interesting and helpful for the communication of the sermon itself, like stories or well-crafted statements or even jokes.

preaching a version of the sermon to a focus group before you preach it to the whole congregation. If done well, you'll get a lot of helpful edits you can actually use—rather than critical feedback *after* the sermon's already done.

A meeting like this doesn't just improve your sermon. It also acts as a great development space for your staff team. They will learn more about your leadership, your vision for the church, and the task of preaching from these meetings than from any other avenue.

When you're thinking about scheduling this sermon feedback meeting, keep two logistical details in mind—*size* and *timing*.

Size: If your staff team is small, this won't be an issue. But as your team grows, you'll need to keep an eye on the size of this group. More than 10 gets to be unwieldy and unhelpful. So if your staff team is larger, think about which people you can handpick to offer you real-time feedback.

Timing: There is a moment in every sermon you write when your ideas are about 50 percent of the way there. It's got enough shape that most people would recognize it if they heard it preached. It's a step or two beyond the random brain dump but several steps shy of its final form. *That* is when you need to bring in your feedback crew.

For Pastor J.D., that moment is around noon on Tuesday, about 48 hours before he preaches the sermon for the first time (we have Thursday night services). You might reach that moment at a very different time. Maybe it's earlier, on Monday or even *more* than a week before you preach. Maybe it's later, nearly at the weekend.

There isn't any "right" time for your sermon to be in this halfway, half-baked, wet cement stage. What's important is finding out when that

happens *for you*. Once you do, time your feedback meeting to align with that stage.

5. Let your resident genius know what is worthwhile and what isn't.

The two main things I'm encouraging you to do with your resident genius are (1) outline other people's sermons and (2) provide sermon feedback. With both processes, it's vital that you give clear instructions and offer course corrections along the way.

Take the feedback process, for instance. Offering feedback is a vulnerable process, both for those giving and those receiving. Because of this, it's pretty common for people to be too polite about what's helpful and what isn't.

You can still be polite. But tell your staff team what kind of feedback you want ("I could use help filling this out with more stories"), what kind you find helpful ("It's really helpful to me when you guys let me know how this is going to sound to a younger crowd"), and what kind wastes your time ("Don't bother with correcting spelling or grammatical errors"). The clearer you can be here, the more it will help them know what they're supposed to be doing.

And don't forget to lean on what is going well. Constructive criticism doesn't have to always be corrective. If you get feedback from your team that really helps, make sure to point that out. You replicate what you celebrate, so if you want more of something, call it out every time you see it.

The same goes for the sermon outlines. Point out the sorts of things you want ("Make sure you give a lot of detail from their illustrations")

and things you don't ("I don't need you to include their opening and closing prayers").

In Summary

So there you have it. Five steps to finding—and helpfully using—a research assistant for your sermons:

1. **Find your resident genius(es).** What you're looking for in a researcher (or a team of them) isn't necessarily the best Bible student. It's someone who can help you communicate better. Prioritize humility and availability.
2. **Collect a list of go-to sermon gurus.** Find the Bible teachers who help you formulate your thoughts best. Make it a thorough list, but not comprehensive.
3. **Have your resident genius outline your gurus' sermons.** Learn from other great communicators (and enrich the life of your researcher in the process).
4. **Have your resident genius and staff team offer you real-time sermon feedback.** This benefits you and it benefits them. But remember: You won't have a lot of time to get feedback about your sermons. So be strategic about when that feedback is most helpful.
5. **Let your team know what is worthwhile and what isn't.** This entire process is only as good as you make it. Don't be afraid to ask for targeted help and to let your team know what works and what doesn't.

Adapt this as best you can to your situation. And, if you're in doubt, just give me a call. I mean it: I'm happy to help!

Pastor J.D.'s List of Go-to Gurus

So there you have it. Five steps to finding—and helpfully using—a research assistant for your sermons:

Tier 1 (If they've done it, we want it)
- Tim Keller: gospelinlife.com
- John Mark Comer: bridgetown.church/teaching
- Joby Martin (The Church of Eleven22): coe22.com/sermons
- Bryan Loritts
- Jen Wilkin
- Beth Moore

Tier 2 (Almost always useful, if it's there)
- Dave Clayton, "Ethos Church" - ethoschurch.org/grow/teaching-series/
- Tim Lucas (Liquid Church in Jersey): liquidchurch.com/messages
- Louie Giglio: passioncitychurch.com/watch
- Steven Furtick: elevationchurch.org/sermons
- Andy Stanley - northpoint.org/messages
- Craig Groeschel: life.church/watch/
- Chip Ingram: livingontheedge.org
- Chip Henderson: pinelake.org/media-resources/sermons/preacher/chip-henderson
- Rick Warren: saddleback.com/watch/media/series
- Scott Sauls (Nashville) [a "younger version of Tim Keller"]: christpres.org/sermons/
- Tim Mackie

Tier 3 (Help, we're desperate)
- Erwin Lutzer: moodychurch.org/watch-online/sunday-morning
- Tommy Nelson: dentonbible.org/media/media-library/view-type/sermons
- Matt Chandler: thevillagechurch.net/resources/sermons

- John Piper: desiringgod.org/messages
- David Jeremiah: oneplace.com/ministries/turning-point
- John Ortberg
- John MacArthur: gty.org/resources/sermons
- Chuck Swindoll: insight.org/broadcasts/library
- Levi Lusko: reshlifechurch.com/series

Sample Sermon Outline

Tim Keller

Enoch and the Purpose of Faith: Commitment, the Way to Intimacy
Hebrews 11:5–7
Sermon outline by Julia Cáceres

Tim Keller, "Enoch and the Purpose of Faith: Commitment, the Way to Intimacy", October 9, 1994, Redeemer Presbyterian

Julia's Summary - Posits that Enoch walking with God means he was reconciled to God in contrast to the rest of humanity at that time, and therefore enjoyed peace with God. Explains that humans and God are at war but can be reconciled by Jesus' death. Great psychological insights about sin and its effects.

Introduction
How can you live a life of power? The case studies in Hebrews 11 tell us that a life of power is a life of faith. Today we're studying the mysterious OT figure of Enoch described in verse 5. All the case studies start with "By faith, (name)" and it's then connected to an active verb (offered, built, obeyed). But Enoch has a passive verb. "By faith, Enoch was taken." So this verse doesn't tell us what Enoch did by faith.

There are only three verses about Enoch in the whole OT. So why did the author of Hebrews use him as a case study of a life of faith? Because in Gen 5:21–24, it says "Enoch walked with God." The first time the word "walk" shows up in the Bible is in Gen 3:8 where it says the Lord God was walking in the Garden in the cool of the day. Adam and Eve had just sinned, so they hid. In the original world, God took long walks with us every evening when the breeze came.

If the 93 million miles from the earth to the sun were contracted into the thickness of a single piece of paper, then the diameter of just the Milky Way would be a stack of papers 310 miles high. The Milky Way is just one little speck in the vast universe. This God, who created all that and holds it all together with the word of his power, would come to us every evening and say, "Let's take a walk. I want to hear what's on your heart, and I want you to hear what's on mine." But the minute humans disobeyed God, they couldn't handle intimacy with infinity any more. When you know you've wronged someone and you see them coming, you go around the other way and hope they don't see you.

Starting in Genesis 3, we were alienated from God. Genesis 3 and 4 shows that the minute we were estranged from God, we were estranged from everything else.

- We're rootless wanderers, full of fear - emotional estrangement
- At war with nature - estrangement from creation
- Disease and death - estrangement from our own bodies
- Violence and killing - Societal estrangement

So, in Genesis 5 when Enoch appears, it's astonishing that someone can still walk with God despite all this estrangement. How is this possible? By faith, you can do it too. Walking with God is seminal to what it means to be a Christian. Christianity is not about a general belief in God or being a moral person; it's about walking with God. Walking with God has

an objective and subjective aspect. We walk in peace with God (objective), and in the presence of God (subjective).

Being at Peace with God - It's possible to be reconciled to God

The semitic word for "to walk" means to be in partnership, with the hostilities gone. Years ago, I read about the history of labor management, including strife and strikes, in the Pittsburgh area in the steel mills and coal mines. The workers said, "In a bad mill, the managers do not walk with the workers, but in the good mills they walk with us." In the Bible, "walk" means no longer adversaries, no longer hostile, reconciled. So Enoch had to be reconciled with God to walk with him.

Why do we need to be reconciled to God? Because we're at war with him. When Adam and Eve disobeyed one of what was probably thousands of directions, something much more fundamental and profound happened than just the violation of one rule. **When someone tells you to do 10 things, you need to decide your relationship to the directions and to the person.** You could do the 10 things strictly because you're told to, or because you agree that they make sense to do. From the outside they look the same, but underneath the motivation is different because your relationship to the person doing the telling is different. If you obey because you're told to, the other person is the master and you're the servant. But if you do them because they make sense, you're the master and the other person is an advisor, in a sense a servant of yours.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed one rule, there was a cataclysm because they were saying to God, "I can take you as an advisor, but not as a king." When two parties claim the same spot, there's a war. Every time you and I are dishonest, impure, selfish, or disobey any commandment, it's a coup attempt. Every time you use your mind, body, or tongue in a way that pleases you instead of God, you are committing treason, assaulting God's mastery. As a result, there's a war.

Most wars operate with one side warring unjustly as the aggressor,

and the other side uses force justly to defend themselves. The aggressor has to use propaganda internally to convince itself that it's really the defendant. The Nazis convinced themselves that Jews were against them. The aggressor says, "It's really your fault. You're out to get me."

That is our attitude towards God. When we claim the kingship of our own lives, we insist that all we're doing is taking what's right, because after all, God is out to get us. The serpent came and told Adam and Eve a lie, propaganda. He said, God is keeping you from your best; you'll never become your best self, because he's keeping you down. When confronted, both Adam and Eve defended themselves, blamed others, and said God was out to get them. This lie has sunk deep into us; it's called our sinful nature, which is character assassination against God.

Some people come from traditional, conservative homes and then move to NYC to break free of those confines. "I'm finally free to do what I feel is right for me." Others are very religious, devout and moral, but always feeling bad about themselves. Both the irreligious and the religious believe the lie that God doesn't love them and are at war with God because they're saying, "It's all your fault."

If there's an aggressor who's warring unjustly, then there's someone who's warring justly. God's problem with us is legal, not emotional. In his restraint, God has passed sentence on us. He allows us to rule, but only in the desert. So we're estranged from everything and under the sentence of death.

God promised that he would send someone who would be wounded, but who would let us back into the Garden. Enoch knew much less about God and salvation than we do, but he chose to trust God's promise of a way to return to the Garden. On the cross, both sides of the war converged on the figure hanging on the cross. Both of us emptied all of our ammunition on him. God made him sin who knew no sin. We also

put our part of the war on Jesus; the people around him (by extension we) mocked and killed him.

What does it mean to be reconciled?

1. Admit that you've been at war with God unjustly.
2. Admit that God's been at war with you justly and has the right to cast you out.

When you see these two things, the cross will thrill you, melt you, and change you.

Enjoying Peace with God

Walking with God means day in and day out taking this peace and working it into your life. Stephen was condemned to death unjustly, but he kept himself together because he looked up into heaven and saw Jesus. He was confident in God's love and was at peace. The more you practice this peace, the more you'll experience his presence in the end. This depends on how willing you are to walk with God, to actually take the peace.

Like today, in the Bible, "walk" is often contrasted with "talk." If we walk with God long enough, if we actually live out this peace and reconciliation, God will eventually do to you what he did to Enoch and bear witness in your spirit that he is pleased with you. You'll feel his presence; Enoch seemed to feel it all the time. Because we have peace with God, we can actually begin to see the reversal of the curse and begin to sense and feel the presence of God when we pray. Don't follow God from so far off. Practice the peace you have. If you don't have the same subjective sense of walking with God, it's simply because you're not practicing in your prayer the peace you have.

If you don't believe you're at war with God, your life is still a walk. Every action you take is leading you either to the Garden or the desert. You can be moral and still be your own master. I implore you. Be reconciled to God.

CREATIVE WRITING IN THE CHURCH

When it comes to creative writing in the church, you've got three options: Do it yourself, find someone else to do it, or never do it at all.

I'd like to encourage you to eliminate that third option from your playbook—and not just because I'm a writer myself. The church is, in part, an organization built on communication. Either you're communicating with beauty and excellence or you're communicating with sloppiness. In any case, you're communicating—which means you should channel some of that communication energy toward the task of creative writing.

But what, exactly, are you supposed to be writing? And how might you go about it?

Let's start with the **what:**

1. What Creative Writing Should Be Done in the Church?

If the church is a communication organization, the most obvious medium for that communication is the weekend sermon. But there are plenty of fantastic books out there to help you grow as a preacher—which, of course, you should absolutely read. What we're concerned with here, though, are the elements of creative writing that no one else will tell you about. Beyond the weekend sermon, what creative writing is available in the church?

Here are a couple of options, each of which we practice at the Summit:

A. Scripts for sermon series videos

We often have "sermon bumpers" leading into our weekend sermons, short videos that introduce the theme and topic of the series we're currently studying. These bumpers are usually about 30 to 60 seconds long, and they require some kind of script. This script is a perfect spot to exercise some creative writing.

The obvious reason for the sermon bumper script is to help the rest of the creative arts team (even if that team is just one person). Having a script provides creative direction for videographers or graphic designers and is almost always the first step in our creative process.

But even when we *aren't* creating a video for a series, we force ourselves to write a short blurb about the series first. Why? Because this helps the preaching pastor clarify his vision for the series. It also allows other ministries to know the major themes of the series. And it provides details for people finding that sermon series online.

These scripts don't have to be long. In fact, they really shouldn't be. But they go a long way toward providing alignment in a sermon series.

B. A recurring newsletter or churchwide email from the pastor

The medium for our churchwide communication has changed a lot over the past 20 years. It used to be a newsletter we mailed to everyone monthly. Then we condensed the newsletter and printed it on the weekly bulletin. For a while, we had the lead pastor post to the entire church using his blog. At this point, we're nearly back to where we started, using print newsletters, but only sending them out two or three times a year.

Whatever format your churchwide communication takes, it is important to have the voice of the pastor come through here. Don't use your newsletter space to merely list statistics or give progress reports on various ministries. Tell beautiful stories of God moving in your church.

Don't Let Our List Limit You

I could think of several other ways that creative writing would enrich the life of the local church—creative kids curriculum, worship songs, spoken word poetry. At the Summit, we don't always use in-house creative writing for these kinds of projects. You probably won't either. But open yourself up to the possibility that some of what you're already communicating might be improved if you had a creative writer at your church try her hand at it.

So much for *what* you might write creatively. Now, *how* do you go about it?

2. Do-it-yourself Creative Writing: How?

Perhaps you consider yourself a great writer. You love the process and others affirm you in it. Other parts of the pastoral job aren't as easy for you, but writing? It comes as naturally as riding a bike.

Then again, maybe writing isn't your thing. You gut it out, preaching on the weekend because, well, you have to. You do your best to grow as a communicator, but everyone knows your strengths lie elsewhere.

I'm a firm believer, by the way, that *both* sorts of people can be excellent pastors. But it helps to know which one you are. If writing is a struggle for you, don't beat yourself up about it; simply find someone that can help (to find out how, skip to point three).

If you've decided you're going to play the role of creative writer at your church, here are a few tips to keep in mind:

A. Read a good book (or two) on writing.

This isn't the space to give you all the best tips and tricks for becoming a great writer. But if you're going to be doing creative writing, you need to get good advice. The best one-stop shop I've come across is Andrew Le Peau's book Write Better.

Other winners are Stephen King's *On Writing,* Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird,* and Matthew Dicks' *Storyworthy*.

B. Build in lead time.

You aren't just writing poetry for fun here. You're writing something to be used in your church at a certain time. Which means, almost certainly, you're working with other people to create a product. And your words live at the *beginning* of that project. So make sure you finish your part of the project with plenty of time for everyone else to play their role.

Not sure how much lead time is necessary? Start by asking the other people in the process. You may be surprised at their answers—but then you'll know how to calibrate your deadlines.

C. Don't use ChatGPT.

ChatGPT can do some incredible things. It can perform extensive and (generally) reliable research. It can get you out of your own routines and ruts. It can find citations way faster than you can—even with the help of ChatGPT's older brother, Google.

Given how impressive AI generators like ChatGPT are, you may be

tempted to think that ChatGPT can create more beautiful writing than you. Resist this thought. It can certainly create impressive text much faster than you. And at times, it will indeed come up with better writing than you.

But as much as ChatGPT can produce helpful text, it is simply not designed to help you become a better creative writer. Your people are not hungry for AI-generated text, no matter how clever. They want—and need—embodied art, which only a human can provide.

3. Finding and Using Creative Writers: How?

Maybe you know you aren't a fantastic writer. Or maybe you are a fantastic writer, but you also know some others that want to serve the church. Either way, you've got to figure out how to find—and helpfully use—creative writers in the church.

This isn't easy. But it's possible. Here are three principles to keep in mind:

A. Not everyone who claims to be a good writer is a good writer.

For whatever reason, writing is one of those skills that people tend to have a difficult time self-assessing. Some fantastic writers seem completely unaware of their talent, while other people (and this is much more common) are convinced they have a special gift—but you don't quite see it.

Whether or not you're a great writer, you can probably trust your gut here. If you aren't impressed with someone's writing, chances are it's not that impressive. Now, you don't have to tell them that assessment so candidly. But you also don't have to try using a volunteer writer just because they've volunteered.

B. Most writers are more *helpers* than *artists*.

If you've found a writer that has some promise, chances are you'll be interacting with someone remarkably similar to your other volunteers. Which is to say, they simply want to use their gifts to serve the church. They just want to help. "Creative writing" may sound artistic and a little woo-woo, but creative writers aren't necessarily artists first. They just want to use a skill they have for God.

I point this out because it can be intimidating to ask someone to help in a writing process. You never quite know how invested they'll get in it or how passionate they'll be. What I'm encouraging you to do is to assume your volunteer writer is reasonable. Most of the time, they will be.

C. Writers need some direction.

Just give it a whirl. Ask them to try something. The worst that can happen is you don't use it. Trust me: They've been rejected before.

More often than not, your volunteer writers will provide something that has some promise but isn't *exactly* what you were hoping for. Don't despair. Do your best to call out what was helpful. Gently point out what doesn't quite fit.

And the next time an opportunity arises, give it another go.

Creative Writing Is Worth the Mess

Creative writing—whether you're doing it yourself or overseeing someone who does it—is a messy endeavor. It would be much easier to just skip it.

But remember: Messy doesn't mean bad. Ministry, after all, is a messy

endeavor. But it's a mess worth making. The same is true of creative writing. Now get out there and make a sanctified mess.

And, if you're in doubt, just give me a call. I'm happy to help!

Sample Bumper Video Scripts

Lasting Legacy

Is there anything more countercultural than the idea that your hard-earned money, your resources, are not truly your own? Yet this is exactly what the Bible teaches. Ultimately, we are stewards—not owners—of the money in our bank account.

It's easy to dismiss this teaching, since most of us tend to sort each aspect of our lives into separate drawers. Some drawers, like those for family or church, we're more than willing for God to open and rearrange. But the money drawer? No thanks, God. We'll keep that one to ourselves.

How much we save, how much we give, whether we choose to invest—surely those can't be spiritual matters … or can they? Because if what Jesus says is true, then everything we have is a gift from God. Yes, even our money drawer.

The good news is, if we listen closely to the countercultural words of Jesus, we can become wise and generous stewards of everything God has given us. Then through us, God will do what only he can—build a lasting legacy.

Finding Love: How Does This Work?

It's estimated that more than 100 million love songs have been recorded throughout history. While musicians of every genre have clearly had

a lot to say about love and relationships over the years, how much of it helpfully depicts how relationships are supposed to work?

Relationships are a great source of joy and pain in our lives. What has great potential to bless also has great potential to destroy.

What does the Bible actually say about all of this? Is there really one "right" person for us? How do we find them? And what do you do when you're single and want to be in a relationship? In this series, Pastor J.D. and Pastor Bryan examine a handful of ancient romances in order to help us process some of these pressing questions within a biblical framework.

Hebrews 11: Broken People and Famous Faith

Faith isn't the absence of doubt. It doesn't mean having all the answers. It means, like Abraham, hearing God's call and going. Like Sarah, hearing God's promise, and against all odds, believing. Like Moses, enduring hardship for the sake of something—and someone—greater.

Hebrews 11 isn't a "Who's Who" of perfect people. It's a record of Old Testament men and women who saw God as more valuable than their own lives. They believed, even in the face of roaring lions. They trusted, long before the walls fell down. What inspired them to go, to wait, to sacrifice, to risk it all, is the same thing we seek to walk in today—daring faith in a perfect God.

Citizens of Another Kingdom

Two thousand years ago, the Apostle Paul said, "Our citizenship is in heaven." But what does that mean for the way we live in this earthly country—especially when it comes to politics?

In recent years, politics has been a source of tremendous division, not only for our country, but for the church as well. How do we avoid such division in an increasingly polarized society?

As we approach a contentious election season, this short series addresses how we can fix our eyes on our heavenly citizenship while still using our earthly citizenship for the sake of the gospel.

The Seven "I Am" Statements of the Book of John (2024)

I AM. Two words that spoke volumes. Two words that echoed the strains of Old Testament narratives, angering Jesus' opponents but breathing life into his disciples. Seven bold, remarkable statements in the Gospel of John begin with these exact words, giving us profound insight into Jesus' identity—and showing us how to truly find ours. Our cries of "I am empty" are met with "I am the bread of life." Our pleas of "I am lost" are countered with "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Two simple words addressing every one of our fears, doubts, and pain: I AM.

2 Timothy (2024)

A letter written by Paul to his young counterpart in the faith, 2 Timothy reads not as an impersonal manual for discipleship, but like intimate correspondence from a father to his child. How do we persevere in our faith in a world that seems intent on destroying it? The truth is, it often helps to have someone who is a few steps ahead of us, modeling what authentic faith looks like and, in turn, pouring into us. Through this series, we will see why relational discipleship is vital to our growth. In certain seasons it may take the form of friendship, while in others it may look more like mentorship, but ultimately, it moves us closer to our collective goal—making disciples who make disciples.

The Whole Disciple (2024)

Dallas Willard once said, "The most important question a church can answer is, 'What is your plan for making disciples?'" We call our plan, "The Whole Disciple."

"The Whole Disciple" is the pathway that allows us to do what Jesus has called us to do—make disciples who make disciples who make disciples. It's a pathway with three steps:

One: become a disciple.

Two: grow as a disciple.

Three: make disciples.

No matter who you are, no matter how long you've been following Jesus, you can take one of these steps. Because Jesus isn't after a 50% disciple. What he's always wanted is … The Whole Disciple.

Everlasting Wonder: Christmas 2023 (2023)

What stirs wonder in you? Maybe you find yourself captivated by marvels of nature or architecture—the Grand Canyon, a beautiful cathedral, or the northern lights. Maybe it's a breathtaking piece of art, the vibrant sounds of a symphony, or the intricacies of the human body. But what about ordinary, everyday objects? Is it possible that they have just as much to teach us about the truths and character of God? In this series, Pastor J.D. considers how four such objects call our attention to the wonder of the Christmas story. As we reflect on them, may our hearts be inspired to worship the true everlasting wonder—Jesus Christ himself.

The Unseen Enemy (2023)

In the face of enormous, heinous, senseless evil, most of us sense, "There is something dark and powerful going on here." Throughout the world, and throughout history, most people would say that's evidence of spiritual forces at work. But in the 21st century? We tend to think talk about spiritual warfare—angels and demons and all the rest—is naive.

But what if we're wrong? What if there really are unseen realities at work all around you? Every writer of Scripture took demons seriously. So did Jesus. Shouldn't we?

In this series, Pastor J.D. looks at the way demons operate in the world today—and, more importantly, how we can overcome their influence.

Jonah (2023)

Jonah: one of the most famous stories in the Bible … and also one of the least understood. It's easy for us to get distracted by a guy getting gobbled up by a fish. But God has much more for us here. Jonah's book is a message of mercy—not only for God's supposed enemies, but also for God's rebellious prophet. And for every one of us.

James (2023)

No other New Testament book is quite like James. Catchy, practical, and in your face, the book of James jumps straight into the nitty gritty of daily life. James takes the lofty doctrines of the gospel and brings them down to earth.

You can't read James without being confronted. James steps on your toes. At times, he punches you in the gut. More than anything, James wants you to do something with the gospel you've been given—to live it out.

James could have referred to himself as Jesus' brother. Instead, he calls himself "a servant of God." And through his book, he's calling us to do exactly that—to serve God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Jesus, Lord at Thy Birth (2022)

The famous hymn, "Silent Night," refers to Jesus with a startling phrase—"lord at thy birth." Considering the circumstances, baby Jesus hardly seemed destined to be lord of anything. Born into poverty, soon to become a refugee, this child should have been overlooked and forgotten. And yet, we sing about him some 2,000 years later, proving the song true. Jesus may have looked insignificant when he was born,

but as John 1–2 show us, there was always much more to Jesus than people expected.

Whatever It Takes (2022)

In this short series (based on stories from Luke's Gospel), Pastor J.D. explores the radical requirements Jesus makes of us if we are to be his followers. Following Jesus is not just adding a little religion to your life or making a few moral tweaks. It is turning your back on all that makes you feel secure and putting in your lot entirely with him—wherever it takes you, whatever it costs you … whatever it takes.

The Songs of David (2022)

For centuries, the book of Psalms has acted as the church's primary songbook. And for good reason: In the Psalms, we find the entire range of human experience, expressed with candor, grit, and beauty. These ancient songs, written by King David and others, show us how we, too, can lift every experience of our lives to God's ear—and God's heart.

The Life of David (2022)

The books of 1 and 2 Samuel follow the biography of David, Israel's greatest king. A king who began his life as an obscure shepherd boy, but became a warrior who brought rival nations to their knees. A king described as "a man after God's own heart." But also a king whose personal sins devastated not only his own family, but the nation. In triumph and in tragedy, this king points forward to a greater king to come.

Goodness in the Middle (2022)

We can see God's goodness in the past—at the cross of Calvary. We can see God's goodness in the future—when Jesus returns, taking the dark and making it light, taking the wrongs and making them right. But what about now, here … in the middle?

Most of our Bible was written by people who were waiting on the goodness of God to break in. Most of our lives are lived there, too.

What would it look like if we trusted God—not just in the past, not just in the future … but trusted his goodness in the middle?

First Corinthians: Cutting Through the Noise (2021)

Life can feel overwhelming. Confusing. Chaotic. Loud. Everywhere you turn, someone wants something from you. Some agenda. Some advice. Some scheme. It's too much.

What if there was a way out of all this noise and distraction?

In the gospel, there is. As we see in every chapter of 1 Corinthians, the gospel cuts through the noise and chaos of our lives, offering a place of certainty and calm.

Daniel: Shining in Babylon (2021)

Looking around at the world, it's easy to feel defeated or in despair. We aren't the first people to feel this way. Centuries ago, God's people were taken into exile under hostile rulers. Yet God equipped them not only to survive, but to thrive. Through the book of Daniel, God invites us to do the same, shining like stars in the midst of the darkness.

In Step: Jesus in the Gospel of Luke (2020–2021)

At The Summit Church, we aim to make disciples, not just converts. Disciples don't just want to know what their master knew, but to do what their master did. As we step out in faith, we commit to do whatever God calls us to do and to go wherever he calls us to go. God doesn't tell us what the entire journey will look like. He simply calls us to take a step of faith. Then another. And another. Join us as we learn to walk in step with him.

CREATING AND IMPLEMENTING A STYLE GUIDE

Jessica Williams, Copy Editor

What Is a Style Guide? (And Why Do We Need One?)

George Bernard Shaw once said, "The single biggest problem with communication is the illusion that it has taken place." If your church has a website, or a newsletter, or an email list, you might naturally assume that actual, consistent communication is taking place.

But if you have nothing in place to guide you, what you are communicating may be more distracting than helpful.

Your church, regardless of its size, likely has a vision that your leaders have agreed upon. This vision might even be summed up in a mission statement that informs how you do what you do. (For reference, at the Summit, we summarize our vision like this: *Following the Holy Spirit, we exist to create a movement of disciple-making disciples, in RDU and around the world*.)

So you *have* a vision. The question is, how can you ensure that you are communicating your vision and mission in a consistent way?

Honestly, you don't need a PhD in linguistics or even a passion for correct grammar to achieve this. What you do need is a concise manual to guide how your church will convey what is most important to you. This manual is called a "style guide," and yes, you *are* equipped to write one.[1]

1 A quick note: What we discuss here, a style guide, is intended only to guide written communication. For considerations such as colors and logos, it may be helpful to create a separate brand guide.

A style guide simply provides guidelines for how things are to be communicated, from issues such as whether you'll capitalize pronouns for God to how you refer to different ministries within your church. What is most important is that whatever you decide, you stick to it, whether you are writing a social media post or adding a new page to the church website. Why? Because if you refer to a given ministry differently each time, it will quickly become confusing. Or, for instance, if your church's website is riddled with spelling errors, potential guests may not make it past the first page.

Think about how *your* first impression of a random company or brand is influenced by how their website looks. You aren't just looking at the fonts, colors, and photos (all of which matter). You're noticing the spelling and grammar too. Be honest: If there are several typos on the home page, how likely are you to click the "Buy Now" button? Do you really want to entrust your credit card information to a company advertising its "delivary" options? Doubtful.

If this is the case for a company website, wouldn't the same hold true for a church website? If people are that cautious with their credit cards, don't you think they'll exercise the same judgment when thinking about their soul?

I'm sure you've seen examples of funny typos in church bulletins. You know: "The Senior Choir invites any member of the congregation who enjoys sinning to join the choir." Or: "Remember in prayer the many who are sick of our church and community." Unfortunate errors, sure, but relatively harmless—and amusing for the rest of us. But imagine a visitor searching for potential churches in the area. They find your website, do a little bit of scrolling, then see several typos on the home page. *"Bbible" study? Really?* Or they see references to "Women's Discipleship," "Women's Ministry," and "Ladies' D-groups." *Are those three different things or one thing they're calling by three different names?*

Suddenly, even before your guest has set foot in the building, your church has lost credibility in their eyes. This is the kind of thing that can be avoided with the use of a style guide (and some time dedicated to proofreading before hitting "publish" on that website).

Take a look at this example from the "FAQ" section of a church's website:

3. How many services do you have and what are the times?
Answer: We have three services every Sunday. Our Sunday service time is 10am!

More than likely, what they meant to say was that they have three services every *week, one* of which is on Sunday. Most people can wade through that mistake and figure it out. But it's just enough of a hurdle that some people won't put in the effort. And then you've lost that person—simply through carelessness. This is an error that could have easily been caught with a bit of careful proofreading, avoiding any potential confusion.

At this point, you may be thinking, *Alright, I'm convinced. I should make sure we proofread our stuff. So can't I just fix all that by having someone read over our website content?*

Yes and no. Think of written communication like driving a car. A careful driver is necessary for there to be safety on the road. But a careful driver *guided by speed limit signs and traffic signals is even better.* Similarly, a careful proofreader is good, but a proofreader with helpful signs and signals is much, much better.

To which you may say, *But how will I know the right decisions to make when it comes to style issues?* Thankfully, you don't have to reinvent the wheel (cue the sigh of relief). We're providing our Style Guide as a reference for you. And other larger manuals, like *The Chicago Manual*

2 The *CMOS* and *AP* are both available online with a paid subscription, or you can choose to have a hard copy on hand if you're the type of person who likes the feel of a physical book (me!). The *CMOS* is quite a bit larger and provides a lot more technical detail for writers and editors, while the *AP* focuses more on grammar and is mainly aimed at newspaper or magazine writers, containing a thorough list of commonly misused words and terms.

of Style (CMOS) and *The Associated Press Stylebook (AP)*, contain just about everything you need, from punctuation help to spelling questions to how to format quotations.[2]

As you look through our style guide, you'll see the most common grammar issues that our staff members tend to have questions about. This isn't a comprehensive guide on grammar; it was designed intentionally to solve the issues churches have most often. So it should give you a great starting point for what you may want to include when creating your own style guide, as well as how to structure it. Our guide also contains a list of terms that we frequently use (many of which are specific to our church and its ministries). While this part won't be quite as relevant, it does provide an example that you can draw from in creating a similar list tailored to your church. Take what is useful; leave behind what isn't.

Personalizing Your Church's Style Guide

The style guides I've just mentioned—the Summit's personalized one, as well as the *CMOS* and the *AP*—can be very useful, but they aren't sufficient in themselves. You'll need to create some tailor-made rules for your church. For questions like whether the names of certain buildings in your church should be capitalized, for example, these style guides won't exactly help you. (Surprisingly, the Associated Press isn't asking whether you should capitalize "fellowship hall.")

As you personalize your guide, here are some examples of issues you will need to address:

1. **Will you capitalize deity pronouns (i.e., "he," "him," "his" when referencing God/Jesus/the Holy Spirit)?** There's no one right answer here. What matters is that you have a position and you follow it consistently. At the Summit, for instance, we've de-

cided to keep deity pronouns lowercase for several reasons: (a) Most Bible translations, including the one we use (ESV) don't capitalize deity pronouns. So this allows consistency with our Bible quotations and our writing. (b) Most religious publishing agencies—like the Society for Biblical Literature or the Evangelical Theological Society—use lowercase pronouns. For that matter, the *AP* and *CMOS* do the same. (c) While we understand that some people prefer to capitalize deity pronouns as a way to show honor to God (we respect that), it's actually very difficult to be consistent in doing this, especially throughout long documents. (d) We have found that capitalized pronouns often turn out to be more of an obstacle for readers, making it difficult for them to truly connect with the writing.

2. **How will you refer to certain ministries? Is it "women's ministry" or "women's discipleship"?** Does your church have "small groups," "growth groups," or something entirely different? Again, there isn't one right answer here. But there should be one right answer *for your church*.

3. **How will you format Scripture quotations?** This is a special use case, but it's one you'll be doing a lot. So you want to make sure everyone does it the same way. For a look at how we do this, see our style guide (linked above).

The bottom line: For anything that isn't addressed by a style guide such as the *CMOS* or *AP*, you'll need to make a decision. It's also worth mentioning here that your church's style guide is intended to be a living document—that is, it should evolve as your church does, as new phrases come into your church's vocabulary. Let's say your church begins a new prison ministry, or a foster and adoptive family ministry—something you didn't have a few years ago. If so, add the name of this new ministry to your style guide. There's no need to view your style guide as something that, once written, is set in stone and can never be changed.

Who Needs Access?

One more consideration before moving on to some extra tools that can be helpful to you: Who needs access to your church's style guide? The short answer—not everyone. While it's useful for at least all ministry leaders to have access, it's not likely that all staff members will need it.

Here at the Summit, for example, some of the staff members who use our style guide regularly include curriculum writers, ministry coordinators, and executive assistants. Depending on the size of your church staff (and whether you have a copy editor on staff, which is rare), it may be beneficial to give the style guide to each ministry leader, while letting everyone else know that it is available to them upon request. A good rule of thumb is that anyone who is writing something that will be seen by the congregation or potential visitors (e.g., the church website or weekly emails) should be using the style guide.

Beyond the Style Guide: Helpful Tools

Whether you choose to use Microsoft Word or Google Docs during the writing process, you'll find that there are quite a few tools to help when it comes to spelling and grammar. Arguably the most popular (if not best) one currently available is Grammarly. With both free and paid versions available, Grammarly is an app or extension for your browser that checks (among other things) the spelling and grammar in a given document. It's known to be quite accurate and is fairly customizable— for example, you can add new words to its dictionary, which can be helpful for more church-specific words that you use often. If all you need is an app to help with spelling and grammar, opting for the free version should cover the basics. The paid version, on the other hand, features things such as an AI-powered writing assistant and plagiarism checker.

Besides Grammarly, my next favorite online grammar tool is QuillBot. Unlike Grammarly, with QuillBot, there's no need to create an account in order to be able to use it. It's free, and you can paste or upload a document directly onto the website to use the spelling and grammar checker.

Finding the tool that best suits you may take a bit of time and experimentation, but you'll be grateful when you don't have to question whether you correctly spelled a tricky word. (Or an easy word, for that matter. Let's be honest, once you've stared at any word for too long, you start to wonder whether you ever learned how to spell at all.)

Final Thoughts

Whether your style guide ends up being 20 pages or one page (totally fine, by the way), the aim is for what you create to be something that ensures that your church's communication of both its vision and the gospel is as clear as possible. A website free of spelling and grammar errors is one that is more likely to be attractive to potential visitors. A weekly church email that is both compelling in its writing and consistent in its use of ministry terms is one that can get members excited about what your church is doing to shepherd its own and reach the lost.

The best news in the world—the gospel—is ours to communicate, so let's do so with excellence.

INTERNSHIP INSIGHTS

The Intern Experience

I've always had a passion for being able to use my creativity in some capacity. But I've always had an even *deeper* longing to use my creativity to bring glory to the one who is the Creator of the world. After all, when I look back at the creation story in the Bible, I am amazed that creativity *literally* begins with God. He is the one who made the heavens and the earth, the sun and the moon, the sky and the stars, and everything else that unfolds before our eyes. It is clear from the creation story that God possesses a heart for beauty and a passion for creativity. And not only did God create the heavens and the earth, but he capped off his creation with humanity. Not randomly either: Genesis 1:27 shows that God created you and me in his own image. God is creative, and since we were created in his image, we possess creativity too.

My intern story started when I made the move from Tennessee to North Carolina alongside my husband, who was pursuing his degree at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. My husband was involved with a residency program through the Summit Institute, which opened our eyes to the possibility of me getting some hands-on ministry experience too. In August 2021, I began my internship with the Summit's creative team.

When I started, I was both excited and nervous. I was thrilled about the opportunity—how awesome to work with such talented people!—

yet nervous because I felt like I was stepping into the unknown. My academic background was in mass communications with a minor in film, so I had some relevant experience there. And for fun, I pursued hobbies such as photography and painting. But beyond that, I didn't have any practical experience to brag about. (Also, in case you didn't catch the timing, it's worth noting that my time in school was during the COVID-19 pandemic, which prevented me from gaining any hands-on experience I *could* have had within the classroom.)

Everyone on the team was incredibly friendly, but it was hard to avoid feeling out of place. Everyone was super talented and had years of experience. Me? I had a passion for creativity and a desire to learn—not exactly the same thing. All of it left me feeling like I knew next to nothing.

In a sense, that was true. I really didn't know much. But that was also the exciting part, because I *knew* I didn't know much. So this was a time for me to learn and find out what I enjoyed, what served the church, and what I was gifted in. Thank God, the internship was able to show me all of that.

It has been several years since I began as an eager (and slightly frightened) intern. I've learned more during these few years than during all of my formal education. I can truly say that this season of learning not only equipped me and developed me, but also prepared me to seek out where God was calling me to use my gifts and talents.

Learning and Growing: What I Needed to Learn About the Creative Arts—and Myself

Throughout my internship, I have had the opportunity and ability to rotate between different fields within the creative team. Whether it was learning the best social media techniques, how to lead a volunteer photography team, or how to design graphics, each of these activities

have helped me improve at this craft. Rotating through all of these (very different!) skills also helped me learn what I enjoyed and what wore me out. I honestly can't think of another way I could have learned this. And who gets the privilege to rotate through different areas of creative ministry, working social media one day, videography the next, and project management the next? Nobody that I know. Sure, plenty of people wear all of these hats when they're working for a small church, but only because they functionally are the creative department. That's stressful and it's no way to grow. I, on the other hand, got to work within a system with much less pressure and a ton of variety. It was a dream.

That's not to say it was always easy. Throughout my internship, I've faced difficulties in several areas. One aspect of this was having to navigate the uncertainty of being an intern: *Am I fully part of the team or not quite?* This uncertainty, especially early on, affected my confidence when it came to sharing ideas in our brainstorming meetings. The people leading the meetings always invited feedback from anyone, but I was still hesitant. I've since learned that my hesitation stemmed from a couple of factors.

First, I was afraid of saying something silly in front of my coworkers. They had been doing their jobs for years. They had shared hundreds of awesome ideas before I ever arrived. I desperately wanted to avoid bombing in front of so many people I respected.

My second hesitation came in the form of a question deep in my soul: *Do I even have the privilege to speak up during these meetings? After all, I am just an intern.* The answer—from everyone on the team—has always been a resounding yes. But my own fear kept whispering, "They don't really mean that. They're just being polite." It has taken a lot of work for me to overcome that hurdle. And the hurdle still exists for me; I just have a lot more experience clearing it now.

I also struggled with any situation in which I might be a burden to the

team. As someone who likes to ask questions out of genuine curiosity, I often felt torn: I wanted to lean in and ask, but I didn't want to ask something annoying. The last thing I wanted was for the team to view me as one more responsibility for them to worry about. *Ugh, there goes Kynleigh again, asking questions and dragging us down.* Even now, as I write it out, I realize it's not terribly rational. In general, people love being asked questions. And I work with very patient people: Every time I asked a question, they were quite literally happy to help answer it. But insecurity can really mess with your head in times like these.

Having talked with a lot of other interns, I've come to realize that fears and insecurities like this are pretty normal. So if you're an intern reading this, here's my encouragement to you: First, don't allow fear to hinder you from speaking up. Trust that God has given you a voice and this opportunity to share your ideas for a reason. Being the new person on a team does not diminish the value of what you have to say. Second, if you're like me and you struggle with feeling burdensome when asking questions, I encourage you to ask them anyway. Take advantage of this season—which won't last forever—where you can freely ask questions, because *the goal of interning is for you to learn*, and you can't learn if you don't ask questions. Every question you ask is an opportunity to grow and deepen your understanding.

And to those of you who are considering adding interns to your team, my encouragement to you is this: First, make each intern feel included by giving them opportunities to grow. Don't just use them to pick up coffee and donuts. Provide them with meaningful tasks while also giving them genuine feedback on the projects and tasks that they've been assigned. I know this is more work than simply handing them the bottom of your work pile, but it goes a long way in making your intern feel greatly valued and appreciated. Remember, *the point of interning is to learn*, so provide them with the opportunity to do just that.

Second, invite your intern to all the meetings, even the "boring" ones.

Chances are, what you consider boring (because you've sat through it one hundred times) will be fresh and exciting for your intern. Meetings are where the behind-the-scenes work happens, which—while tedious—is pivotal to any team.

Third, regularly take your intern out for coffee, lunch, or some other one-on-one check-in. Your intern is a bit like a sponge, bursting with all kinds of new information, new processes, and new skills. One-on-one time with you will help her synthesize everything she's learning, preventing her from getting overwhelmed. It also acts as a reminder that you care about her as a person, rather than merely as a producer of content.

Lastly, I don't think this is a one-person effort. If your department is made up of multiple people, I would encourage your whole team to be intentional with your intern too. One person will have to run point. But you'll lose the benefit of working on a team if your intern only ever interacts with you. Do what you can to connect your intern to the rest of the team. And if your team's intern isn't working directly for you, take the first step of intentionality with her. You may be surprised by the possibilities that follow.

Explore New Areas, Make New Mistakes, and Embrace New Skills: Parting Words to My Fellow Interns

If you're interning—or even considering it—you're probably pretty young, like me. (There's a place for older interns too! But statistically, it's more rare.) God willing, you have decades worth of ministry in front of you—which means now is the perfect time for you to investigate a wide range of ministry possibilities. I know God has given you certain gifts and passions, but don't limit yourself solely to these. Be open to exploring other areas, as you might discover unexpected talents and develop a passion within the creative field.

For instance, when I began my internship I recall having a strong desire to dive into video production. I had always enjoyed watching videos that are visually appealing and tell a story, so it seemed like a natural fit. But as I began to learn more about creating video content, I was able to be behind the scenes and I realized quickly that what takes place is not an easy process. Still, creating video content was something that I wanted to learn—so I did. It just took a lot of patience and hard work. But that slow process allowed me to learn several skills that I wasn't even thinking about when I started, like how to film a studio shoot or how to edit a video after it has been recorded. Keep your eyes open to new learning opportunities, even if they aren't the ones you expected at the start.

As the wise Janetta Oni (our creative director) often says, "You can and should always be learning something new." This means that regardless of your age, background, or skill level, it's important to remain open to new learning opportunities. But learning new skills doesn't happen overnight, and it doesn't happen seamlessly. It requires *a lot* of patience—and it means making a ton of mistakes along the way. To which I say: *Make them*. As Ed Catmull says, "Mistakes aren't a necessary evil. They aren't evil at all. They are an inevitable consequence of doing something new."[1] You're in this internship to learn something new. So get out there and make the mistakes you need to make in order to learn.

The beautiful part of being an intern is you're given the freedom to explore new interests, make mistakes, and embrace new skills. You're not going to get it right on your first try, but you will be giving God glory through your efforts to learn. So lean into all of it, remembering that "whatever you do, [you are] work[ing] heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ" (Colossians 3:23–24 ESV).

[1] Ed Catmull and Amy Wallace, *Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces That Stand in the Way of True Inspiration* (Random House, 2014), 7.

HOW TO MAKE THE PERFECT POUR-OVER

Austin Franks, Videographer
(and Barista, Sorta)
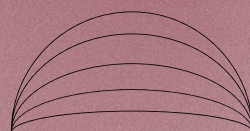
Forget videography and writing. Forget web design and social media. To truly increase your creative potential, what you need is coffee. And I'm here to teach you the sacred art of the pour-over.

No disrespect to the French press or the cold brew, but our team at the Summit generally sticks to pour-overs. The pour-over is an elegant process from a more civilized age. Or, at least, it's a really reliable way to make a killer cup of joe.

Making a pour-over from scratch might seem intimidating. But don't fret: It's easier than you might think. You only need six things, half of which I'm sure you've already got—hot water, coffee beans, a grinder, a gooseneck kettle, a filter—and this helpful step-by-step process.

Step 1: Pick your coffee beans.

When making pour-over coffee, the most important detail is to always start with freshly ground beans. It's up to you whether you buy pre-ground coffee or grind your own beans; whoever does the grinding, make sure it's fresh.

As for the roast, we recommend opting for a high-quality light to medium roast.

And the brand? This is much more a matter of taste. But here are some

of our favorites, not only because they sell quality stuff, but because they're local to us—Onyx, Counter Culture, Black and White, Derby Coffee, Heart Coffee, and Methodical.

Step 2: Start measuring.

It's not strictly essential, but you'll probably want a scale to help measure the beans and water. Some good scales are the Tally Precision Scale, the Hario, or the one that we use, which is a great budget-friendly option. (We found it by literally searching "cheap coffee scale.")

Generally, a good water-to-coffee ratio is 1:16, but you should experiment and find what tastes best to you. So if you are using 20 grams of coffee, you'll need 320 grams of water. A bit more, say, 25 grams of coffee, and you'd use 400 grams of water. (We recommend you stick with grams, because it actually measures the same thing. Frustratingly, an "ounce" of ground coffee and an "ounce" of water aren't equivalent. There's probably a formula for this out there, but we like to keep it simple—grams all day.)

Step 3: Find the right grind size and grind.

The grind size is essential when making pour-over coffee because it determines how quickly the water will extract flavor from the beans. We always recommend using a medium-coarse grind. The grinder that we use is called a Baratza Encore, but if you have the money and can swing the Fellow Ode, we'd definitely stand by that one.

P.S. If you have the money, maybe buy two of the Fellow Ode and send one to me?

Step 4: Prep the filter.

Grab a cone-shaped filter and get it ready before you pour. With your dripper on the carafe and the filter in the dripper, pour just enough hot water to wet the filter. This not only gets rid of potential "papery-tasting" notes, but also preheats your carafe for extra heat retention.

Be sure to empty out any water before starting the brew process.

Step 5: Heat the water.

The ideal temperature is 205°F, or 96°C. Yeah, we know—it's super specific. But it's important for proper extraction. The best way to get an exact temperature is with a gooseneck kettle that has a built-in thermometer, like this one from Fellow. Other electric water kettles can do the trick too; the important thing is getting one with a specific heat setting.

Step 6: Pre-wet the grounds.

Once you've set up your filter, it's time to add in the coffee grounds. Once the grounds are in the filter, shake the coffee grounds *lightly* to flatten the bed. (You may want to tap the side of the dripper to level it off.) This helps the water flow evenly through the coffee, rather than finding channels to go through.

Next, start pouring your hot water at the center of your dripper, working your way out to the sides in a slow spiral. Pour 50 grams and wait 30 seconds for the coffee to "bloom" and release some of its flavor. If you see it bubbling, you know you've done something right. If you don't—well, it'll still be coffee in the end; it just may not taste as great.

Step 7: Pour the water.

Once the grounds have bloomed, it's time to pour in your hot water—*slowly*. Try to have an even and slow pour so that all grounds are evenly extracted. Your total brew time should be right around three to three and a half minutes.

Step 8: Enjoy your cup.

You did it! Now enjoy your fresh java.

This entire process may seem like a science experiment for crazy people, but the whole process should only take about five to six minutes. Plus, it'll make your coworkers' heads pop up from their screens, creating a "water cooler" moment where you can all take a break and catch up while you pour.

Looking for the Right Equipment? Here's What You Need

Dripper: This is the vessel that will hold your coffee before you transfer it into your cup. Technically, it's not completely necessary, as you can brew right into a mug. But it's nice to have a glass one like this to help you watch your pour.

Gooseneck Kettle: This is used to control the water temperature and flow rate—and it really does matter which one you choose. We like the Fellow Stagg EKG kettle.

Coffee Beans: Be sure to use freshly roasted, high-quality beans for the best results. We lean toward light roast beans and ones with floral notes, but feel free to experiment here!

Grinder: A high-quality grinder is another important piece. Make sure that you're getting an even and consistent grind, no matter which one you choose.

Filter: You'll need a paper filter to make classic pour-over coffee.

Measuring Devices: You'll need a scale for accurately measuring beans and hot water. You can get fancy with one like the Tally Pro, but we just kept it simple and looked for a cheaper option that still gives us the weight down to the tenth decimal. It also includes a timer, which is handy.

If You're Looking for Some Extra Fun

After a while, you may find yourself desiring a cold cup of pour-over coffee, but may not be sure where to start. You're in luck: We've found the smoothest, "coolest" cup of coffee around and you only need one more piece of equipment!

This one will surprise you: To make this classic, you need the same equipment that you would use for a pour-over—plus a cocktail shaker.

Here's what to do.

Step 1: Pick your coffee beans.
This is the same as before.

Step 2: Start measuring.
Use the same equipment here, but note that the ratio will be a bit different. You'll want an over-extracted cup since we'll be adding in water from melted ice later. So aim for a ratio of 1:10 rather than 1:16.

For instance, grind up 28 grams of beans and brew a total of 280 grams of water.

Step 3: Find the right grind size and grind.
Grind size is the same.

Step 4: Prep the filter.
Same process here for the filter prep. You've got this.

Step 5: Heat the water.
Keep that temperature at 205°F!

Step 6: Prep the cocktail shaker.
While the water is heating, fill your cocktail shaker with ice—all the way up. The kind of ice doesn't really matter, though it'll feel and sound different depending on the size and shape.

Step 7: Pre-wet the grounds.
Same as before. Take your time here and make sure you get that perfect "bloom."

Step 8: Pour the water.
This is slightly different. After the initial bloom, wait about one minute. Then, slowly pour in about half of your water. Wait another two minutes, then slowly add in the rest of the water.

Step 9: Shake it up!
As soon as your last drop of water is in the dripper, transfer the contents of the cup into the cocktail shaker (which should be filled with ice at this point). Make sure you've got the cap securely on top of the shaker, then give this a solid shake for about 15 seconds. (If you're having fun, you can shake it for longer. But at that point, it's really only for show.)

How to Make the Perfect Pour-over

After you've shaken it like a Polaroid picture, strain your coffee over a cup. The cocktail shaker should have its own strainer on the end: Just remove the cap and pour, *making sure to keep both halves of the cocktail shaker together.*

Add ice if you want—just know that you won't need it, because the coffee will be really cold.

Step 10: Enjoy your cup.
You've earned it.
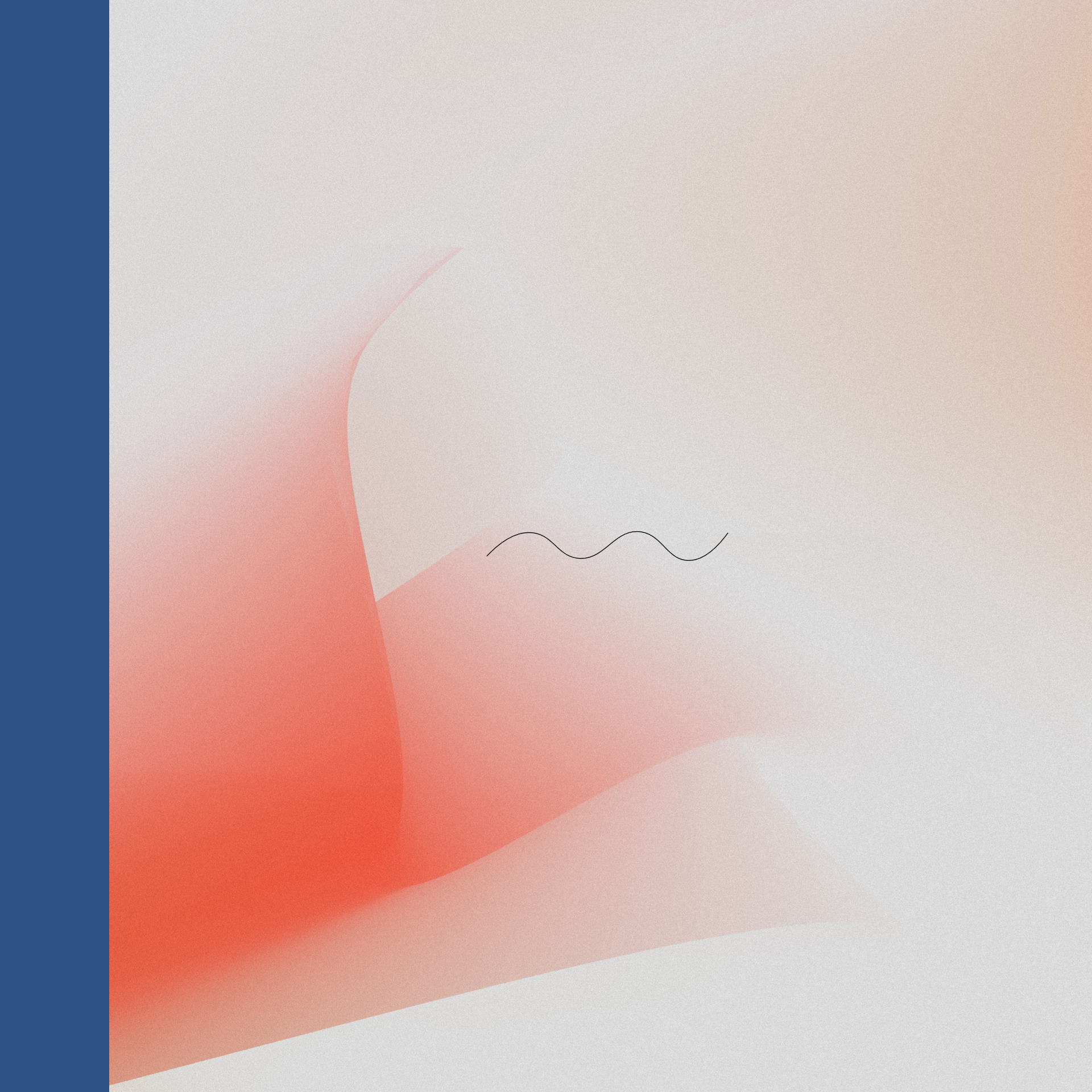
CONCLUSION

**go, now—you
are ready**

Well, you made it. That or you jumped right to the last chapter, like some kind of sicko. Either way, here you are, at the end.

Except, as you well know, this isn't the end at all. Sure, it's the end of our rambling advice. And we sincerely hope you've found it helpful. But you've still got to get up tomorrow and create slides for the weekend sermon. You've got to schedule Instagram reels for the next few days. You've got to edit a video for an upcoming conference.

The work just keeps coming.

What you're doing is hardly ever glamorous. It's not even always public. But it's always important. As you create, as you lead others to create, you are mirroring the image of our creative God. No flower he created was a waste. The same is true for you: No project you lay your hands on, if done for God's glory, will be wasted.

Your church is different from ours in many ways—in location, in size, in available resources. But in one fundamental way, it is exactly the same: You are following Jesus and using your gifts to point others to him.

We don't know how many people you'll reach over the coming years with your creative endeavors. But we do know this: God has placed you there. And where God calls somebody for service, God always equips them for the task. Our prayer is that this handbook has been a useful piece of equipment on that journey.

You now have our best advice. More importantly, you have the Spirit of God. Go, now—you are ready.
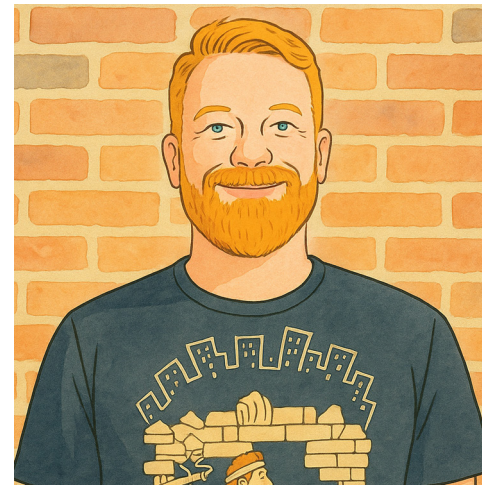
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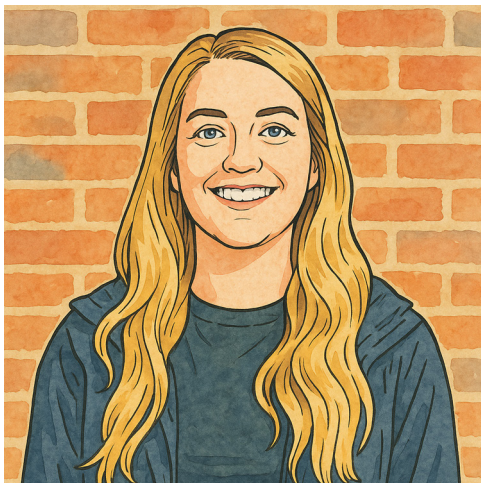
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