



# THE BIG PICTURE

BY CAMRON WARE



Visuals are everywhere in our culture, woven into our daily lives—we are literally surrounded. The problem is that most of those visuals are not God-glorifying. We as the Church have the means, and the responsibility to not only use visuals to bring glory to him, but do so in a creative and fresh way. God created us as visual creatures and gave each of us unique gifts in order to worship him, but I find it interesting how the Church today is usually following the visual culture instead of leading. It wasn't always this way—the Church used to be really good at using visuals in our buildings and worship services, and I think we are just now seeing the pendulum swing the other way back to the use of culture-leading visual art in the Church.

Think about a cathedral you might have seen a picture of, or even stood in; the building is a palette full of color, imagery, emotion, and story. For the cathedral builders, the architecture was art, the ceiling was a canvas, and the walls were both literal and figurative windows to God's creation. Tapestries, paint, mosaics, and of course stained glass were used to show stories of the Bible and glorify God. So, what happened? Why are the worship spaces built in the last century in the Western world often these big, blank, bland boxes of white walls?

## VOICE OF BEAUTY

To avoid the appearance of Roman Catholicism and the danger of actually worshipping

the images instead of God, Protestantism retreated to buildings of monochromatic blandness. Now, in the past couple of decades we as the Church have gotten a little better—our walls might be mocha instead of white with stained concrete in our coffee shop, but the concept still applies. We might have screens all over our sanctuary showing high-definition images, but our walls and rooms still speak silence.

Ten years ago I started as the lighting and visual director for a megachurch in Dallas, but like most churches, we never had a big enough budget for what I kept seeing in magazines and live shows, and I thought we could never get to that level of visual experience. I was always trying new things with lighting to try and fill our blank white walls, but it just wasn't quite what my heart wanted to do. We had rented some projectors for a children's event, and while I was packing them up I wanted to see what it would look like if I simply projected imagery all over our walls. After showing the leadership a presentation on what I called "environmental projection," they asked how soon we could install it and use it every Sunday. Since then I have moved fulltime to helping churches implement visuals and imagery into their worship services.

## AWE-INSPIRING ART

Environmental projection ties directly back to those cathedrals, and I often refer to it as "post-modern stained glass." It surrounds the congregation and engages us in wor-

ship in a subtle and beautiful way. There is something indescribably powerful about being with fellow believers in a room worshipping and being surrounded with names and attributes of God that serve as a visual reminder about who he is.

However, because our canvas is now an entire room instead of just a square screen, using this can be dangerous—which might sound harsh. The phrase "less is more" applies so strongly that if it's not followed, the projection can get very distracting and probably should be turned off. It's not meant to "be watched" actually—environmental projection is there to create an environment, not be another video screen. Think of it as digital wallpaper—it is not a plasma TV on a wall that is bright and demands your attention but instead a dynamic piece of art that happens to be your entire worship space.

## SET THE SCENE

Projecting imagery on the walls is not the same as the visual media you use on your main house screens. I've found that textures and abstract art colors work well, as well as urban and nature-scapes. This is not a place to show your image magnification or sermon points, but a way to take your congregation to a place other than the four walls of your sanctuary. Stained glass imagery is my personal favorite, and rightly so since we are taking this concept directly from real stained glass and what it was intended for. Because each church's visual narrative is going to be different,

how you use environmental projection is going to be unique from the community down the road. The key is having the right people to understand what visual worship means and how to use environmental projection as a tool.

It is important to understand that this is not simply shining projectors on a wall—it has a deeper impact on us than

simply "observing." Environmental projection engages people. It allows designers and artists to use their gifts to glorify God through photography, graphic design, and art just like the stained glass maker did in those old cathedrals. The people designing the projection are to be thought of as "visual worship leaders." They are leading the congregation in visual worship, just

range! But there is a huge range of church styles and sizes. Environmental projection is 100 percent dependant on your room, and there isn't a cookie-cutter solution if you want to do it well. Just because one church buys three of a certain projector doesn't mean that system will work best for you. There are so many variables to consider when doing environmental pro-

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you might realize at first. We are painting imagery onto the walls, masking out parts we don't want the image on, and making it fit both technically and philosophically in your church community. Just as the worship leader chooses songs to reflect the message, the visuals in your church service are as important as those elements. It's not only another instrument playing a part in your visual story on a Sunday—it can be a storyteller all by itself.

## VISUAL WORSHIP LEADERS

The people designing and running the projection are no longer simple "button-pushers," and the congregation is not

like the worship pastor is leading through music and Scripture. The visual worship leader and the music worship leader need to be in relationship—they need to be able to talk and plan out each worship service so the imagery matches the musical elements, and vice versa. They must take the time to meet with the worship and senior pastor to know where the service needs to go visually.

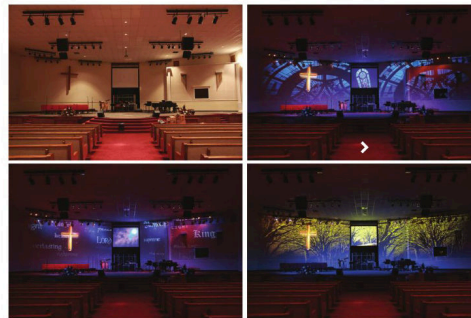
## THE COST

The biggest question I get asked is "How much does it cost?" Typically, churches spend between \$5-25k doing an entire system from start to finish. That's a huge

projection that you really have to see the entire setup live in your room first before any money is spent on gear. In the world of projector brightness, it's also a reality that all manufacturers measure their brightness of their projectors a little bit different, so it's key to see projectors live in your room first.

Many churches are beginning to put as much emphasis on environmental projection as they do their lighting and video system, and that's so encouraging to my heart. I believe that if you're going to do visual worship in your church, do it well and with intention. However, the word "well" is a relative term, especially when the word "budget" is near it. When I first started doing EP in my home church I was using two old Dell laptops and glorified PowerPoint. Today it's much easier and more flexible, but the desired end result has never changed.

My heart is visual worship and the Church, and using projection and lighting to tell stories, create and change environments, enable artists to use their gifts, and glorify God. I hope this is encouraging and exciting; and if you want to know more please email me—I want to help in any way I can.



BEFORE & AFTER

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