

stuff you wish they taught in seminary



3 Important Ways

YOUR CHURCH SHOULD "SHOW, DON'T TELL"

RICH BIRCH



Around 65% of people are visual learners. [ref] That means that the majority of people attending your church take in information more effectively when it is in the form of images rather than text. **This reality has huge implications for your church that many leaders aren't considering today.** So much of what we do in churches isn't adapted for the visual learners in our crowd, and as a result much of what we are communicating isn't as accessible or memorable for those who are visual learners.

If you aren't actively thinking about how you can "show, don't tell" what your church is trying to communicate, you are simply missing the majority of people in your church. Consider these facts about the power of imagery in relation to the style of communication at your church [ref]:

- The brain can see images that last for just 13 milliseconds.
- Our eyes can register 36,000 visual messages per hour.
- We can get the sense of a visual scene in less than 1/10 of a second.
- 90% of information transmitted to the brain is visual.
- Visuals are processed 60,000 times faster in the brain than text.
- 40 percent of nerve fibers are linked to the retina.

I'm convinced that too much of what we do in church doesn't take this core fact about the way many people prefer to communicate into consideration. Our churches frequently use too many blank slides with text on the screens. We stand in one spot to talk at people and assume that they are taking in what we're saying. We ask people to stare at words on a page but don't think about the importance of ensuring comprehension of the context of those words. Here are three ways your church can step up your visual appeal starting right now. You'll see an almost immediate increase in engagement!

Your messages will be more memorable with a great prop.

Next time you prepare a message ask yourself this simple question: "What prop could I bring on stage with me during this message to make it more memorable?" A well employed prop can help drive home the core ideas in a way that words simply can't. Props can also engage the creative part of a person's mind and take the meaning to a deeper level.

Take a moment and think about the [46 parables of Jesus](#). At the center of his communication style was the use of powerful imagery and it's not hard to imagine him pointing to or holding objects to express the deep meaning he was attempting to convey. Here are just a few examples that come to mind:

- New wine in old wineskins (Luke 5:37-38)
- Rich man foolishly builds bigger barns (Luke 12:16-21)
- Sower and four types of soil (Matthew 13:3-8, 18-23)
- Mustard seed (Mark 4:30-32)
- The sheep, gate, and shepherd (John 10:1-5, 7-18)
- Signs of the future from a fig tree (Matthew 24:32-35)



3 Tips for Using Props in Your Message

- **Practice** // Holding something in your hand in a way that people can see it can be a little tricky to do. Doing that while you're still attempting to make a point is a whole other level. You'll need to run through this a few times to get used to it. (Believe me!)
- **Core Point, Not Frill Idea** // Ensure the prop you use relates to the core idea of your message, not as window dressing or "entertainment". If it's not an essential part of the message, it will seem like a "frill" to your audience.
- **One Prop Per Message** // Don't confuse people with multiple props, particularly when you first start using these tools. You risk watering down the effectiveness of an image by having too many of them.

Make your offering talks more sticky with visuals.

Prevailing churches use the minutes in the service before the offering is received to connect people's giving to the vision of the church. They leverage those moments to help people understand that their gifts to the church make a difference. Don't rush this portion of your service; rather, slow it down and punctuate it! Don't miss the opportunity to leverage these moments to help your church

move towards being fully funded. Make your offering talks even more sticky by adding compelling visuals to really drive home the message and motivate people towards a more generous lifestyle!

3 Ways to Add Visuals to Your Offering Talks

- **Always Use a Slide** // Don't ever (EVER!) have an offering talk that doesn't feature a slide of some kind at the same time. Talking about how giving helps fund the youth ministry? Display a picture of a recent youth event. Explaining that a portion of the offering goes to fund missions work in Guatemala? Show a picture of the country! The offering is a very tangible part of the service, so make it even more approachable with an image!
- **Props** // Using a prop during the offering will amplify curiosity and engagement. This is particularly helpful when you're highlighting the funding for a specific aspect of a given ministry. Talking about funding a summer camping trip the young adults group is going on? Bring a backpack on stage with items that they might pack. Doing a year end campaign around adding some elements to your kids' ministry? Bring some of the items that you are looking to add on stage with you.
- **A Guest or Two** // Although another person is not really a "visual" in the strictest sense of the term, having a guest join you for the offering talk is a great way to add some visual variety. Are you funding an upgrade to your parking lot? Bring a member of the parking team on stage (in their safety vest of course!) to answer a few questions about how the upgrades will benefit your guests! Want to connect the dots for people on how their funding affects the "normal" stuff of the church building? Bring up someone who was "new" to the church in the last year and interview them about what they remember from their first visit. Then you can point out all the aspects of the building that they commented on!



BONUS: [Offering Talk 201 // An Advanced Strategy for Encouraging Generosity at Your Church](#) // Check out this post for examples of some very visual offering talk set ups! These videos are a great way to introduce the offering at your church.

People need to "see" the vision of your church.

Why does your church exist? What is the big idea motivating what you do as a church? What is unique about your church that isn't true of other organizations in your town? **The story of what drives a church often includes visual elements, but ironically those ideas get flattened down to just concepts.** The stories behind the "why" of churches are often times very compelling. I've heard stories that talk about the early days of a church when the leader sold tomatoes door to door to pay for the start-up, and while that leader was selling tomatoes they would ask what needs the church could meet in the community. Or how about a church that was started when a leader was struck by all the families that were unable to attend church because they were busy taking their kids to soccer every weekend? So many origin stories are rich in visual imagery that can be used and retold to push the vision of the church forward.

4 Churches Using Powerful Imagery to Spread Their Vision

- **Crossroads Church** // [Check out this industry leading "About Us" page from this church.](#) It invites you to scroll through the vision of the church, and at every stop you are shown a compelling image that gives you a better sense of what makes the church unique. Each "vignette" is mostly imagery with a small amount of text to make the message clear and memorable.
- **Red Rocks Church** // [Drop by this church's "Stories" page to see the mission in action!](#) Many churches have video testimonies on their websites that feature amazing stories of life change, but what this church does goes beyond the typical "person sitting in a chair talking to the camera" type video. These stories of life change illustrate what's important to the church and presents them in a powerful way!
- **Traders Point Christian Church** // How does a church honor its past while still pointing towards the future? [Check out this church's "I'm New" video that explains the history of the church.](#) Watch carefully as the history of the past is framed in the mission of

the church for the future. This church does a masterful job telling its entire story while inviting people to be a part of it!

- **Liquid Church** // Some people love infographics! [The infographic on this "Our Story" page does a solid job capturing the years and years of this church's history.](#) The flow here helps to celebrate the past but does so in a manner that points to the forward movement of the church. It's like every step of the past builds on each other to bring us to today!



Bonus: Use fewer words in your emails.

The irony of this post isn't lost on me so I'll try to bring it to a close with this idea: Stop sending your people emails that are paragraphs and paragraphs long. Break up your text with bullet points and lists like this long post. Look for an arresting image to send with a small body of text to grab their attention. People are not most likely reading those long emails you're sending them!

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