

# VISUAL WORSHIP

BY CAMRON WARE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CAMRON WARE

# VISUAL +

VISUAL WORSHIP | SERMON GRAPHICS | TOP PRODUCERS | PRODUCER SPOTLIGHT | REVIEWS



My passion is visual worship. Using tools such as backgrounds and lighting, I love to create worship environments that are relevant, sacred, peaceful, warm, edgy, serene, upbeat, and engaging. Over the past few years working at Irving Bible Church, I've learned what it means to worship visually. I've learned how to create an environment that lets the congregation go where they need to go to worship God, rather than an environment that distracts.

Every visual element in a worship setting plays a role. The color of the room, the theme and color of the background, the type and size of fonts used, font positioning, and even font color; they all influence a worship service. That's why I believe all these elements should work together, particularly during the worship band's set. Often when I get the song list for an upcoming Sunday service, I'll take some time to experiment with different colors and themes to see what fits best. Sometimes the color of the room and background are the most important things; sometimes the background itself will be the main focus and color doesn't matter a whole lot.

## COLORS

I'll try not to bore you with lighting details, but I feel it necessary to describe our setup a little bit. We have no intelligent fixtures—only conventional fixtures. Our color pallet consists of amber, blue, and red, and those colors show up throughout the sanctuary. Our equipment gives us the ability to create both warm and cool looks, as well as everything in-between.

The color of the image also is extremely important. Nine times out of 10, I use single-color backgrounds. I find a monochromatic color scheme reduces distraction and allows the congregation to focus on the lyrics and images more easily—rather than having to fight through several colors. Generally, I stick to blue, amber, orange, red, purple, sepia, and black-and-white schemes.

## FONTS

Font choice is often an underused tool in reinforcing the feel of the song. An edgy, rough font produces an urban look, which can be great for a song such as "Those Who Trust." Slower, more introspective songs such as "Be Lifted Up" can benefit from a handwritten script font for a more personal, intimate feel. Again, every element plays a part.

Often, churches use the same font throughout a service. In fact, we used Arial (14 point, bold, italic, center-justified) for every song, every Sunday, for years. It was safe. Everyone could read it perfectly. It's been only a year since we've introduced different fonts, but it makes

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a huge difference. These days, I never use the same font on two consecutive songs during a worship set. Also, when the band plays a song they've played before, I'll change the font to keep it fresh. The words of each song seem to just run together if the same font is used every time, but using a different font helps make songs unique. Plus, each font has a style all its own, and a well-chosen font can truly match the vibe of the song. Lately, I've been thinking of deleting the Arial font from our computer.

## IMAGERY

The background image that goes behind the lyrics of the song is probably best described as the base or foundation of the visual elements. When choosing background images, obviously it is best to choose something that fits the lyrics themselves. "Wonderful Cross" naturally suggests an image of a cross. Sometimes though, that approach can become redundant, so don't be afraid to freshen it up. Consider pairing "Wonderful Cross" with an image of a crown of thorns or a nail. To keep things from getting stale or repetitive, I almost never use the same background more than once for a specific song.


Personally, I use only images as backgrounds that are real. A lot of imagery designed for churches is computer-generated, and that's fine if that's what you like, but they scream "Fake!" to me. I love the warm feeling I get from a photo of an actual candle or the peace I feel when I see a real flower on the screen.

of cityscapes, roads, buildings, or people—can be very relevant and powerful when used correctly. The Urban feel can convey the truths of this world—the pain and sorrow, as well as the love and peace. I use Urban on missional songs whose lyrics are outwardly focused on people and the world at large.

## PROJECTION

Recently, we've gotten a little creative with some projectors in our sanctuary. Instead of using lighting fixtures on the front wall of the sanctuary, we use projection. There are three projectors at front of house position on a shelf that hangs from the underside of the balcony. One shoots to the large brick wall behind the stage. It shoots roughly 30 feet wide and 40 feet tall. The other two projectors shoot onto our front/side walls and main screen frames, all of which are made of off-white sheetrock, roughly the same size as the center wall. When all three projectors are on, they can create the illusion of a seamless image. It looks like there are no screens, no square edges. The images morph onto the walls of the room, flowing from one wall to another, making the walls appear alive and vibrant. Also, I have the edges of the projectors blurred out right at the lens so the image on the wall fades in on the sides. I should mention the room was not designed for this purpose; it was built like any other modern worship center. Discovering the possibility of projecting onto the walls was merely a happy accident. Also, a consulting company, such as Shepherd Multimedia, is vital to making sure

create a post-modern cathedral using images and video. The imagery isn't intended to be watched like a TV or movie screen. Instead, the intent is to foster a mood and an environment in which to worship God.

***As a disclaimer, some of this can be dangerous. Using large projected images, floor-to-ceiling and wall-to-wall, can quickly become overwhelming and distracting. Image and video selection are critical. Also, it is important that you are discerning about what is appropriate for your church—each church is different. Whatever your church's style, less is definitely more. However, when lights, colors, images, and projection work together with music, the stage is set for a powerful, multi-sensory worship experience.*** 

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Of the several thousand images we use, all of them can be classified as Abstract, Nature, Sacred, or Urban. Abstract can really be anything—edgy, rough, risky, but unique. I usually use an abstract look on fast, energetic songs. Nature is self-explanatory, simply images of Creation. "All Creatures of Our God and King" is a great example of a song that works well with Nature imagery. Sacred is just that—images that communicate sacred themes (e.g., an old church, a cross, or pictures of Jesus). Urban images—pictures

you get the right equipment to match your budget, space, and vision.

From the congregation's perspective, the three projected images surround the viewer and transport him to a place other than a church with sheetrock walls. The images are intentionally extended into the audience's peripheral vision, but they aren't extended so far as to prompt the audience to turn their heads from one side to the other. Just as ancient cathedrals and churches were covered with paintings and stained glass to tell a story, these projectors