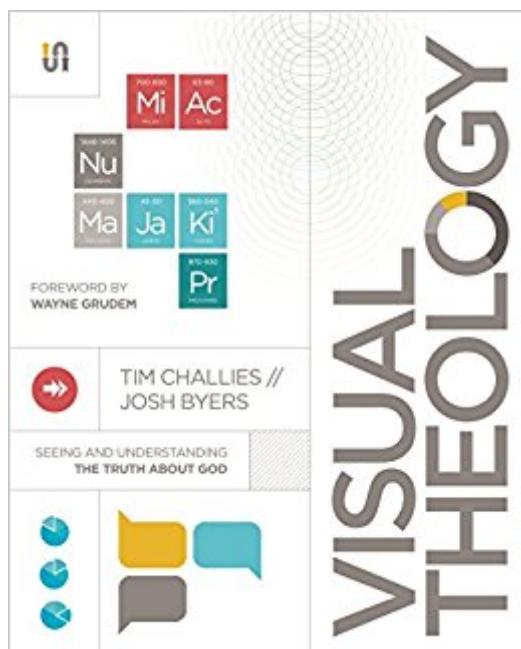


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# Visual Theology: Seeing And Understanding The Truth About God



## **Synopsis**

We live in a visual culture. Today, people increasingly rely upon visuals to help them understand new and difficult concepts. The rise and stunning popularity of the Internet infographic has given us a new way in which to convey data, concepts and ideas. But the visual portrayal of truth is not a novel idea. Indeed, God himself used visuals to teach truth to his people. The tabernacle of the Old Testament was a visual representation of man's distance from God and God's condescension to his people. Each part of the tabernacle was meant to display something of man's treason against God and God's kind response. Likewise, the sacraments of the New Testament are visual representations of man's sin and God's response. Even the cross was both reality and a visual demonstration. As teachers and lovers of sound theology, Challies and Byers have a deep desire to convey the concepts and principles of systematic theology in a fresh, beautiful and informative way. In this book, they have made the deepest truths of the Bible accessible in a way that can be seen and understood by a visual generation.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Tim Challies (the writer) and Josh Byers (the designer) have teamed up to produce a truly unique introduction to theology and guide to living the Christian life. This is show-and-tell at its finest. Most theology books merely convey what we are to believe, but this one uses creative and beautiful design to capture and portray these crucial truths. I know of nothing else quite like it, and I trust that God will use it to help his people see and celebrate reality in a new way. -- Justin Taylor, managing

editor of The ESV Study Bible and coauthor of The Final Days of JesusYou've probably seen (or used) a gospel presentation drawn on a whiteboard or a napkin. It's remarkable how God gives us spiritual insight when we behold truths about him with our eyes. With engaging graphics and descriptions of the Christian faith, Tim Challies and Josh Byers have done something genuinely unique in Visual Theology. See for yourself! -- Gloria Furman, author of Treasuring Christ When Your Hands Are Full and The Pastor's WifeMy mind is blown. Tim Challies and Josh Byers marry rock-ribbed Reformational theology with breathtaking presentations. The effect is something like following John Knox into the Matrix. In this diaphanous world, we encounter no fiction, but very reality itself --- God-reality --- and we are transformed. -- Owen Strachan, associate professor of Christian theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological SeminaryA delightful read. It combines wise knowledge of sound theology with a readable, inviting style. -- Wayne Grudem, professor and author of the bestselling Systematic TheologyA resource that will be of immense help to believers in our visual age. -- Nancy Leigh DeMoss, author and Revive Our Hearts radio hostThis is simple yet profound, clever without being flashy. Helpful and practical. Speaking as a person who avoids diagrams and graphs at all costs, I found the infographics in this book to be illuminating. This cheeky little number is a class act. -- Mez McConnell, pastor of Niddrie Community Church, Edinburgh, and director of 20schemes

A pastor, noted speaker, and author of numerous articles, Tim Challies is a pioneer in the Christian blogosphere. Over 20,000 people visit Challies.com each day, making it one of the most widely read and recognized Christian blogs in the world. Tim is also the editor of DiscerningReader.com, a site dedicated to offering thoughtful reviews of books that are of interest to Christians. Tim is the author of The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment and Sexual Detox. He and his family reside near Toronto, Ontario.Josh Byers is a communications pastor, artist, speaker, husband, and father who resides in Iowa. Josh is an idea maker and creative visionary. His work has been featured in a wide variety of outlets from the Gospel Coalition to the Tonight Show. He writes and publishes graphics regularly at joshbyers.com.

This book was great first off! There's a few things you should probably know before purchasing. The book is paperback obviously, but since it's not a small book, readers may be a little cautious when they are opening the book. I hate putting creases in pages but the book does not lay flat. Another thing, the book IS NOT only infographics. It's actually presented more so as a chapter book. There's a lot to read with the frequent infographic appearing on every other page or so. Every once in a

while an infographic does take a whole page spread but this is not common in the book. All this to say, if you buy this book, it will be a reading experience more so in my opinion than a solely visual experience. Either way, upon reading it, it is a good practical book to have as Christian. The theology in this book is by no means rigorous or intellectual to a point where you can't follow. It's pretty basic gospel points presented beautifully. I would recommend this as a book to read and browse through but not a book to have too deep of a theological study with. It's a beautiful book inside and out, and you definitely should grab it!

Challies and Byers introduce Visual Theology by saying, "we live in a visual culture, increasingly relying on infographics and other visuals to help us understand new and difficult concepts." Challies and Byers are spot on with this need and the first thing that struck me about their book is how aesthetically pleasing its production was. I try to buy as many books as I can via Kindle today, but was glad in retrospect to be unable to purchase this book in that medium. The book is well designed and even the feel of the pages makes a reader happy. That said, the title itself is a bit misleading. The book wasn't visual in the way I anticipated nor was it theology in the way I anticipated. Once I re-calibrated my expectations as I read the book I was much happier, but I do wonder if the title will make more readers than just myself surprised by the contents. The visuals are almost mostly word art, with some infographics thrown in. Depending on your tastes, this might be disappointing. It was to me. That isn't to say that some of the art isn't very helpful (Byers infographic on the books of the Bible with information about date of writing and authorship is fantastic, for one), but that at least to me a fair portion didn't inspire or lead me to a deepened understanding as I would have hoped. Likewise, Challies's writing (which he fully acknowledges) is not attempting to plunge deep, but rather sweeps through four basic categories of becoming and living as a Christian: (1) Grow Close to Christ, (2) Understand the Work of Christ, (3) Become Like Christ, and (4) Live for Christ. Unsurprisingly given that division (but surprising to me given the title) the book is much more practical and basic than intellectual and historical. Far and away my favorite section was found in the first part of "Becoming Like Christ" where Challies as clearly as I've heard anywhere explains how we destroy sin in our lives. It is an excellent practical and succinct contemporization of John Owen's "Of The Mortification of Sin." This section alone makes the book well worth reading and using. I hope to use Visual Theology (particularly the section just mentioned) in counseling as well as in some introductory classes. Additionally, I hope the book finds its way into the hands of many as a first introduction to practical theology. Finally, I do hope for more books to be written in this vein. I would love to see, for instance, a book where Makoto

Fujimura or Bruce Herman partnered with a theologian to provide a more abstract and contemplative take on the same premise.

I very much appreciate Tim Challies' thoughts and writings. I don't connect to many blogs, but his I do on pretty much a daily basis, if for no other reason than to see what's on his a la Carte listing of Kindle discounts and the articles he thought were interesting. When I read the premise for Visual Theology, I thought it sounded like an interesting concept. I often think up pictures, charts, and graphics to help understanding difficult concepts, and especially to use for teaching purposes. So I thought if Tim Challies' has already created some great visuals, then I wouldn't have to come up with my own. What a great resource! But the book title is misleading. Or perhaps it is a concept that--I hate to say--is poorly executed. This is less a book on theology, and more of a primer on Christian living. Yes, it contains theology, but this is not like a systematic theology book; it is more of a book about how to live the Christian life. And yes there are visuals, but there is also a LOT of text. In fact, the book is MOSTLY text. There are colorful icons throughout and some larger PowerPoint-ish creations (diagrams, flowcharts, Venn Diagrams, etc.) that make for a pretty slick appearance. But the overall look is more like a colorful textbook than a book explaining Christian Living through simple and insightful visuals. And here is the rub. In my mind, visuals should enhance understanding of concepts that are difficult to explain without a lot of text. "A picture is worth a thousand words" after all. But I found that the visuals in general provide very little understanding beyond what the text has already explained (remember, there's a lot of text!). Without the text, many of the visuals are not sufficiently self-explanatory. And there are a whole lot of concentric circles, and lines pointing to individual rings within these concentric circles, that really don't seem to mean anything in particular. And then there are flowsheets (e.g. page 96-97) that really are just too complicated. Perhaps if I spent the time to study it in detail it would make more sense. But then again, aren't visual supposed to simplify and bring clarity to the text? I understood the text fine; the flow sheet, not so much. It reminded me of something I once saw/heard in which the military had banned the use of PowerPoint because the diagrams and flowsheets had become so complex that the information being communicated was no longer understandable to anyone other than the speaker. I think that's what people mean by "missing the forest for the trees," and in a lot of ways, this is the problem with Visual Theology. The text itself is very Biblical, as I would expect from Tim Challies. So I find no fault in the message of the book itself. If I had one criticism of the theme of the book, it would be that I think the emphasis is too much on what we need to be doing, as opposed to why we do it. But that may be due to recently reading books like Matt Papa's "Look and Live" and

Tony Reinke's "Newton on the Christian Life" (both of which I HIGHLY recommend.) In summary, I highly respect Tim Challies and appreciate the concept for this book. The theology is solid and is still useful as a primer for Christian living despite its shortcoming. But I wish the "visual" portions of the book offered more insight and clarity rather than just adding superficial splashes of color.

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