CHURCH GRAPHIC DESIGN 101

A GUIDE TO USING CANVA

WRITTEN BY JEROD CLARK

INTRODUCTION

YOU CAN BE A VISUAL STORYTELLER

To be an effective church communicator, it often feels like you need to be a polished graphic designer. As communication tactics continue to evolve, trends across the web and in print are continuing to rely on less text and more images. When you look at your weekly slate of work, it's likely filled with small, and sometimes large, design based tasks. A once text heavy bulletin now has to feature images and concise writing. Social media posts rely heavily on images people can consume in a glance. Image driven websites require you to think about telling the story of your congregation in new and inventive ways.

While design may not be your current forte, it's something you'll increasingly need to learn. (And we're here to help.) When used right, a mix of streamlined text and compelling artwork, not only guides a user through the communication experience, but also leads to people actually listening to what you're saying. But this change in communication strategy means that many communicators like you must learn the basics of graphic design. Sounds daunting, right? It's okay. Take a breath. Fortunately, there are tools out there to make basic graphic design easier for any skill level.

Enter Canva. This easy to use, online graphic design platform provides free design tools and hundreds of premade templates and images, with additional premium selections for paying customers. Even as a free-use customer, Canva (www.canva.com) has a lot to offer helping you create the perfect graphics for use on social media, your website or in print. You don't need expensive or complex design software to make well-designed graphics. In fact, we built this whole ebook using Canva. (For the record, we have no formal relationship with Canva. We're just big fans of the product.)

In this ebook, we'll show you how to use Canva by tackling two common church graphic design projects. The first task is making a social media image that places a quote over a photo. The second task is creating a website graphic that displays church service times. After walking you through each project on Canva, we'll look at the graphic design best practices we used to create them. By the end, we hope you'll have the basics of Canva under your belt as well as a few graphic design tips and tricks to help you be a more confident communicator.

CLARITY OF MESSAGE

No matter how cool a design looks, it's completely ineffective if it doesn't have a clear message that encourages someone to take action. Graphic design starts with planning. Before you ever start doing layout, here are three key questions to consider.

Who is the audience? The more specific you are, the easier it will be to create the right message and graphics. If you find yourself saying, "My audience is everyone," start narrowing your target. You should speak differently to men/women, your congregation/community, long-time believers/new attenders, etc.

What will be appealing to them? First, think about what text will resonate with your target group. Second, reflect on what design will grab their eye. Put your own design aesthetic aside and think about what would catch the attention of the people you hope to reach. You may personally love hand-drawn or flowing script fonts, but that's likely not the best way to connect with a male audience, for example.
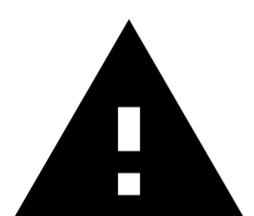
What is your key call to action? When someone looks at this image, what do you want them to do next? Keep this simple and concise.

UP NEXT

Let's get hands-on with step-by-step instructions for creating two common design project in Canva.

PASTOR QUOTE FACEBOOK IMAGE

SCENARIO

Your pastor rocked his Sunday sermon, dropping little pieces of wisdom throughout the entire 30-minute message. On Tuesday, you decide you want to keep your congregation motivated by reminding them of a few of his memorable words. Your goal is to create a text over image graphic to share on Facebook.

STEP 1: CHOOSE A PROJECT TYPE

In the main Canva menu, there is a wide variety of already created templates that meet document and social media standards. This takes much of the guesswork out of determining the right size for your graphic. For this project we want to do a square image, so select "Social Media." (If you wanted to use a rectangle shape, "Facebook Post" would work, too.)
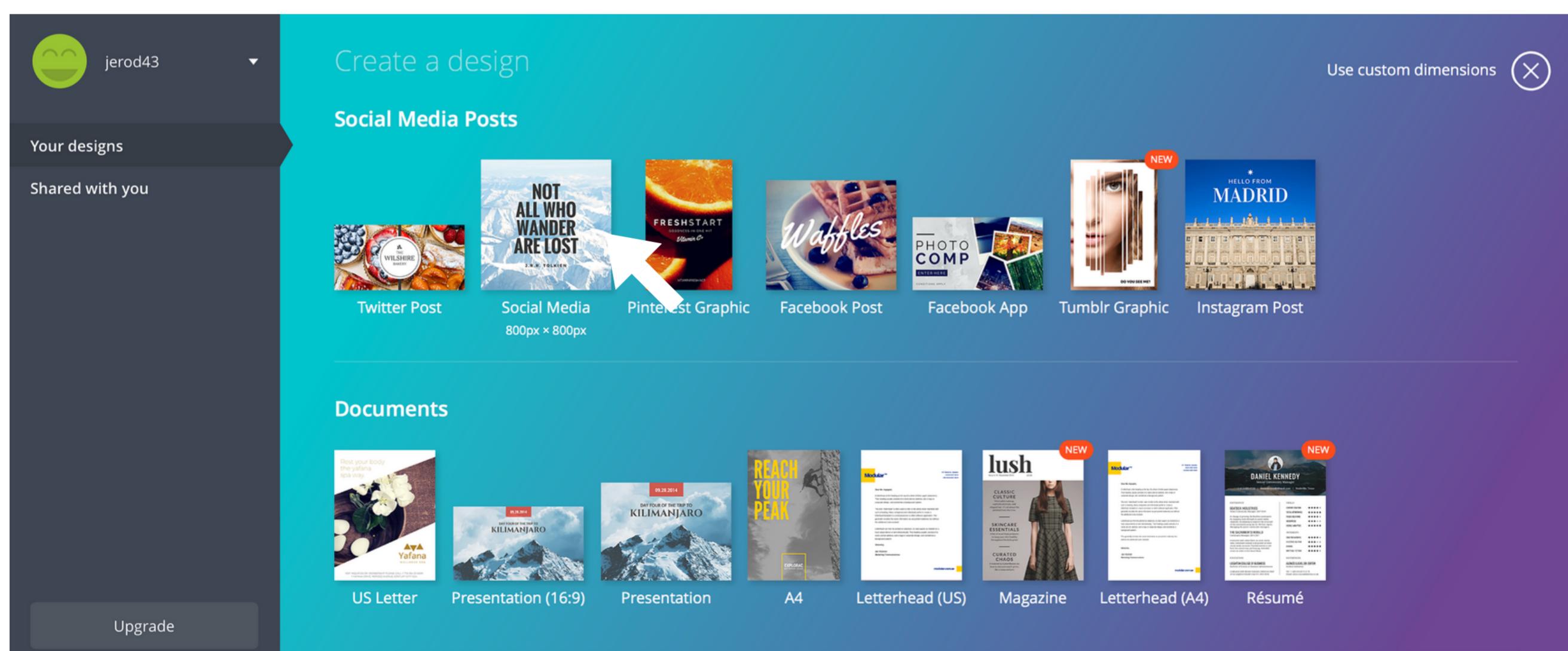

STEP 2: SELECT A DESIGN TEMPLATE

One of the best parts of Canva is the library of pre-made designs. Many are free. Others cost a small amount of money. Even if you decide not to use a template exactly as it is, it can be a good starting point for a project. You can customize it by deleting elements, changing fonts, switching images, etc.

The example quote we'll use in this project is from Bill Hybels, Senior Pastor at Willow Creek Community Church in the Chicago area. The theme is quieting our lives to hear God's voice.

Click the "Layouts" tab on the left. Looking through the templates, there is a free option that is text over an image of a wide open field of grass.
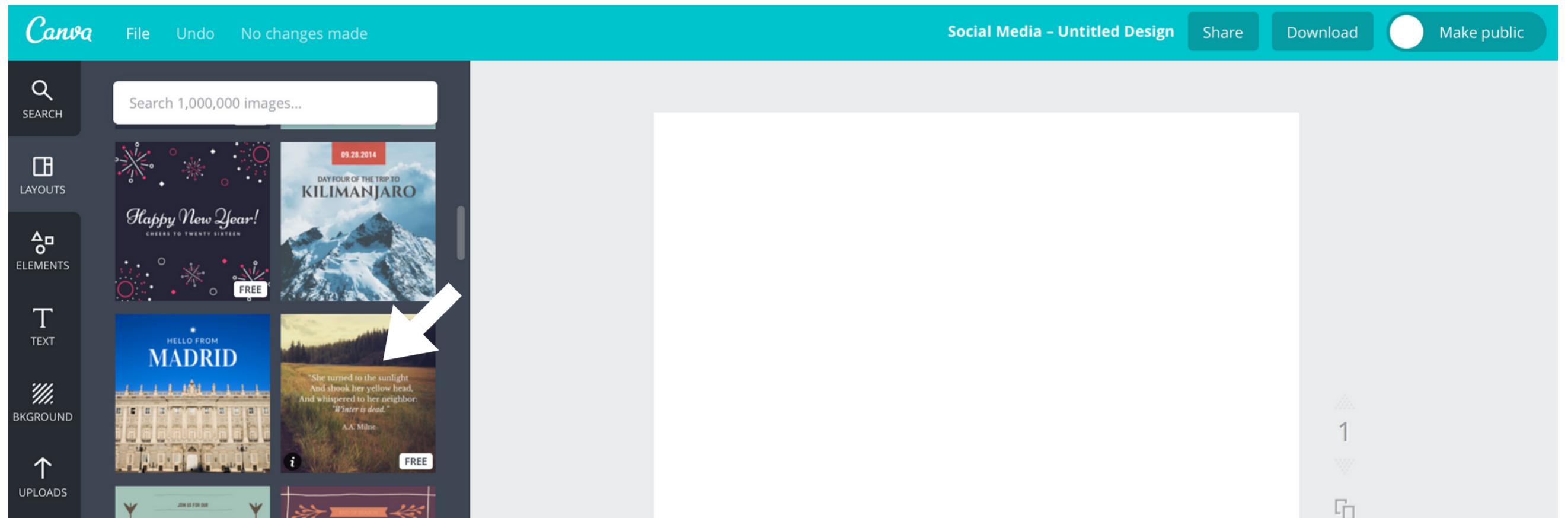
STEP 3: ADD CONTENT

Clicking on the template will load it into the design area were we can make a few simple edits. First, select the main text area to paste in the pastor's quote.
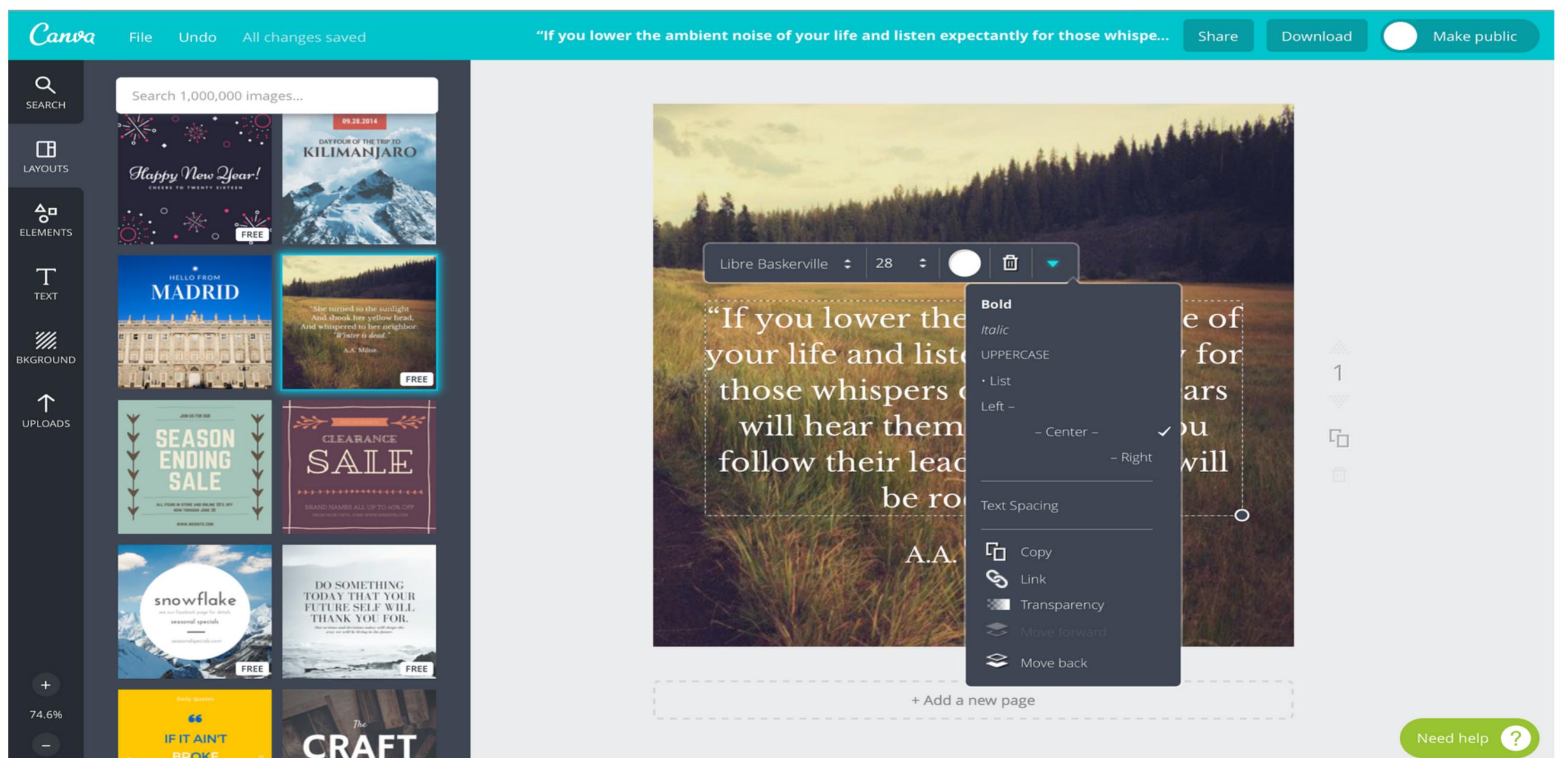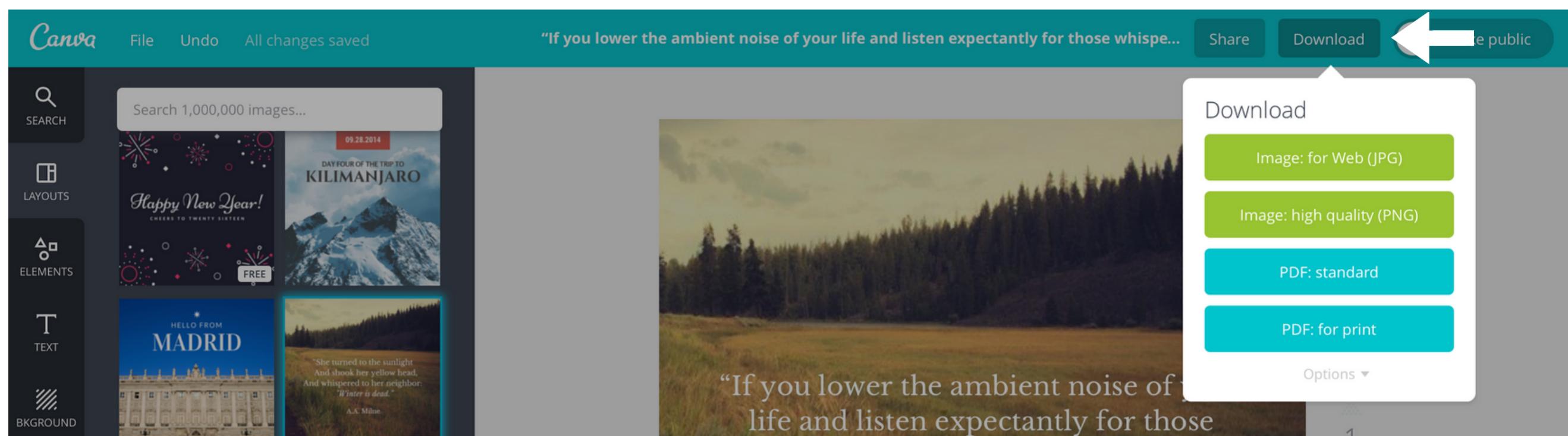

Anytime you click on a design element, like a text box, a menu bar will appear with a dropdown arrow for more options. Here you can change the font, text size, color, alignment, transparency and more. This menu is also where you can copy a design element. For example, this is helpful if you want to use the same size and font style for text elsewhere in an project.

Since our example quote is a bit longer than the text that was originally in the template, we'll make the font a little smaller. Now we're ready to export the image so we can use it on Facebook.

STEP 4: EXPORT YOUR PROJECT

To save an image to your computer, click "Download." A drop down menu will give you choices for file types. Either a JPG or PNG will work for this project.


FINAL DESIGN

"If you lower the ambient noise of your life and listen expectantly for those whispers of God, your ears will hear them. And when you follow their lead, your world will be rocked."

Bill Hybels

LEVEL UP: ADD A SHAPE

Hey, there is nothing wrong with the image we just created. It's simple, readable and on trend with current design styles. But let's say you want to make the text stand out a bit more. We can do that by adding a transparent shape behind the text. This popular design trend will add a little more depth to the image.
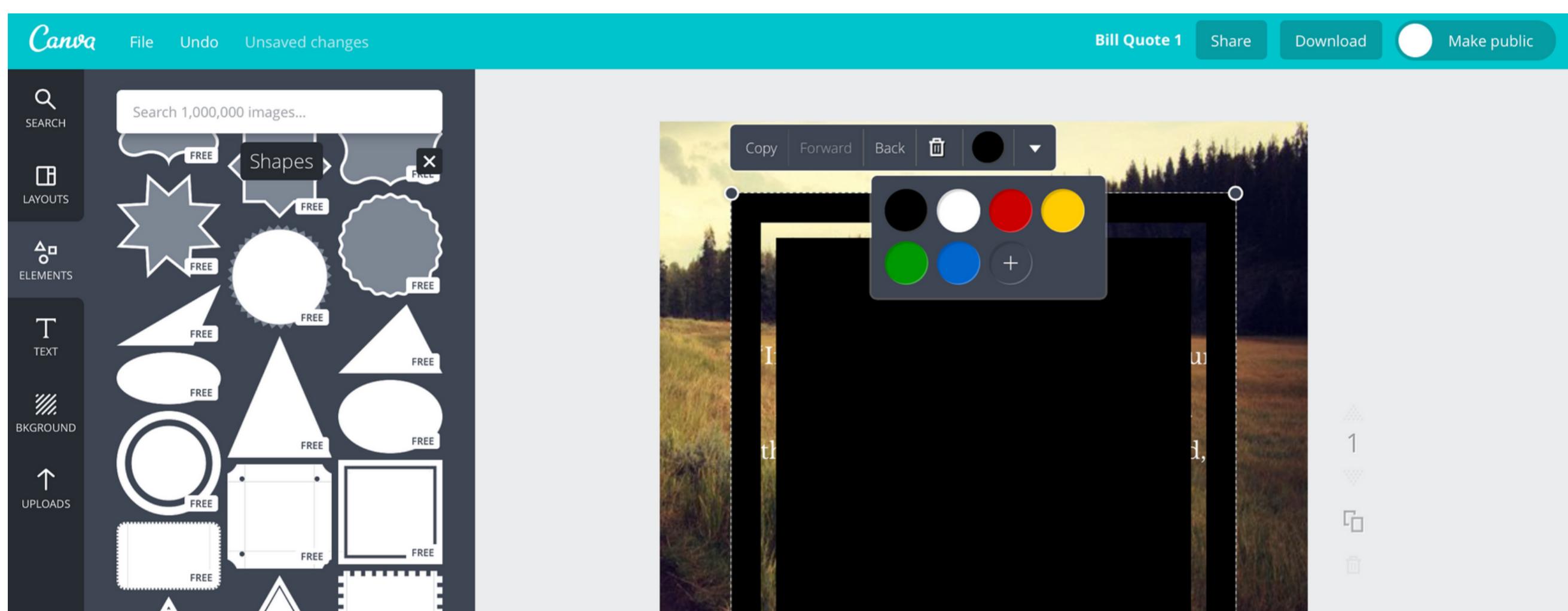
STEP 1: SELECT A SHAPE

Click on the "Elements" tab on the left and then choose "Shapes." Scrolling through and you will find a box outlined with a square.
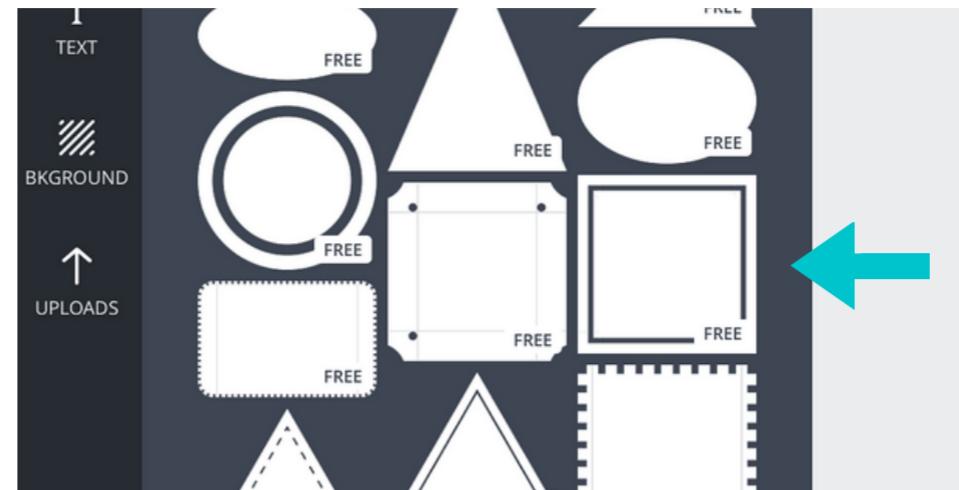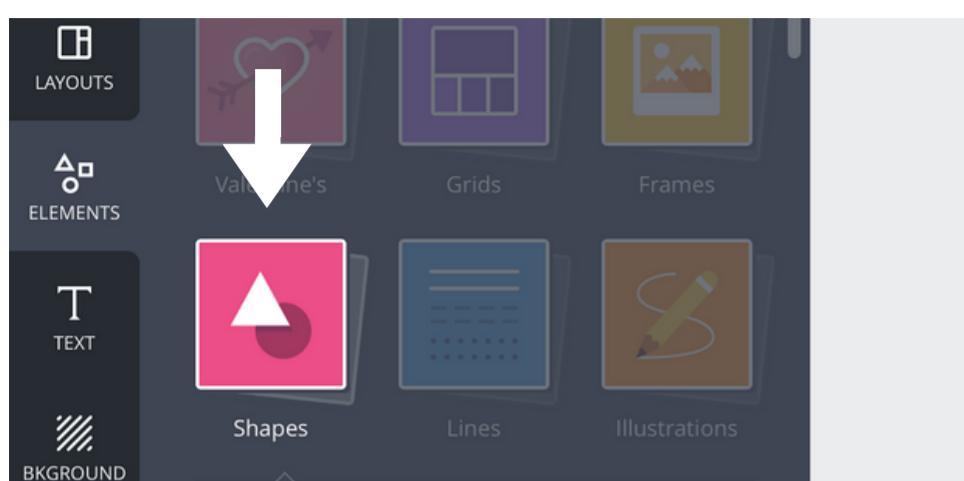
STEP 2: FORMAT THE SHAPE

When you first select the shape it will be a black square sitting on top of the design. Obviously, that won't work. The list below outlines the steps to take to make this shape fit our design.
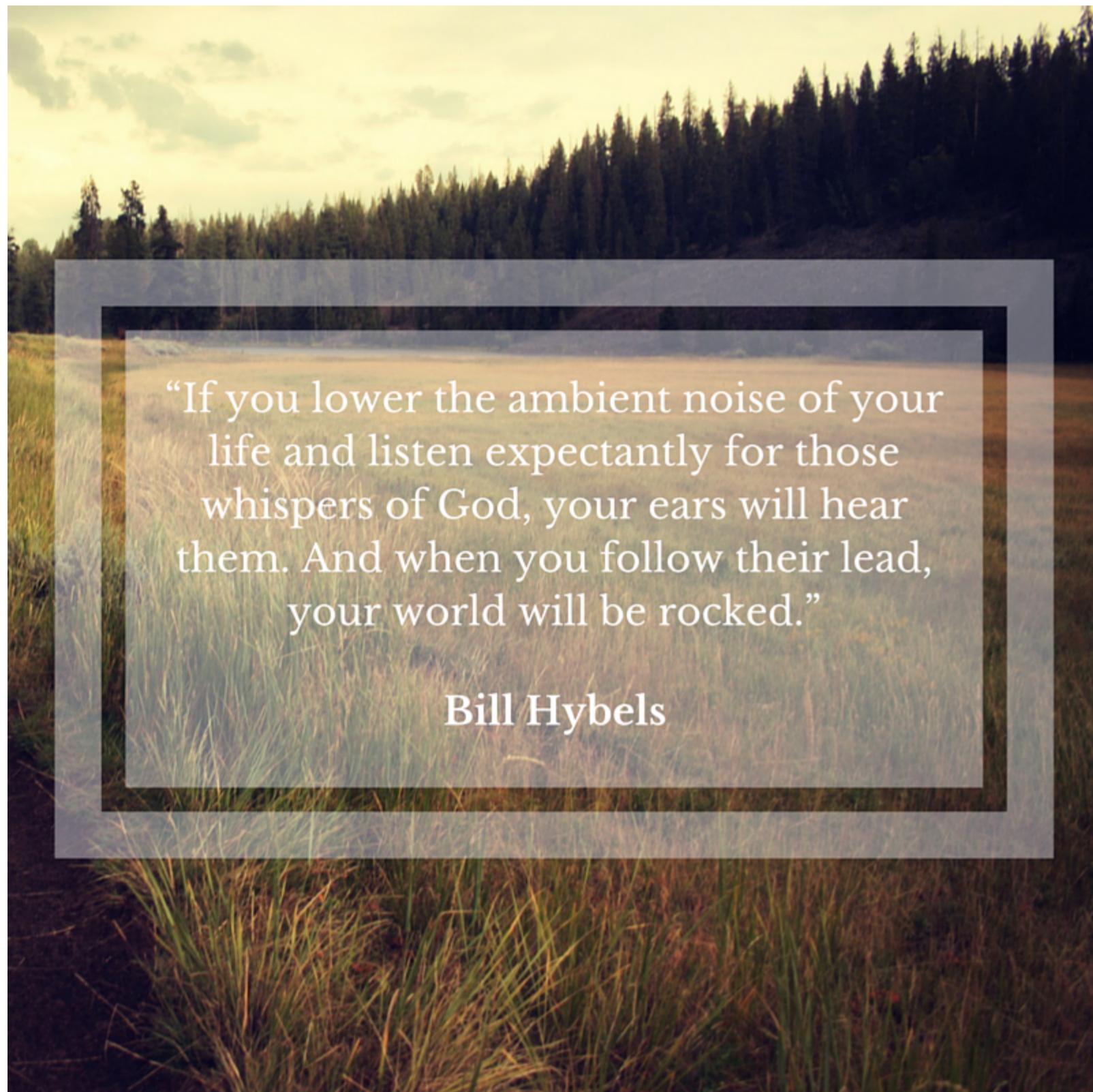

- Change the box color to white
- Adjust the transparency to make the box more opaque. (We used 40%)
- Move the box "Back" one layer. (Think of layering as if these were actual pieces of paper piling on each other)
- Adjust the size of the box so the text fits in it
- Center align all of the elements by selecting each piece separately and move it until the center purple guideline appears
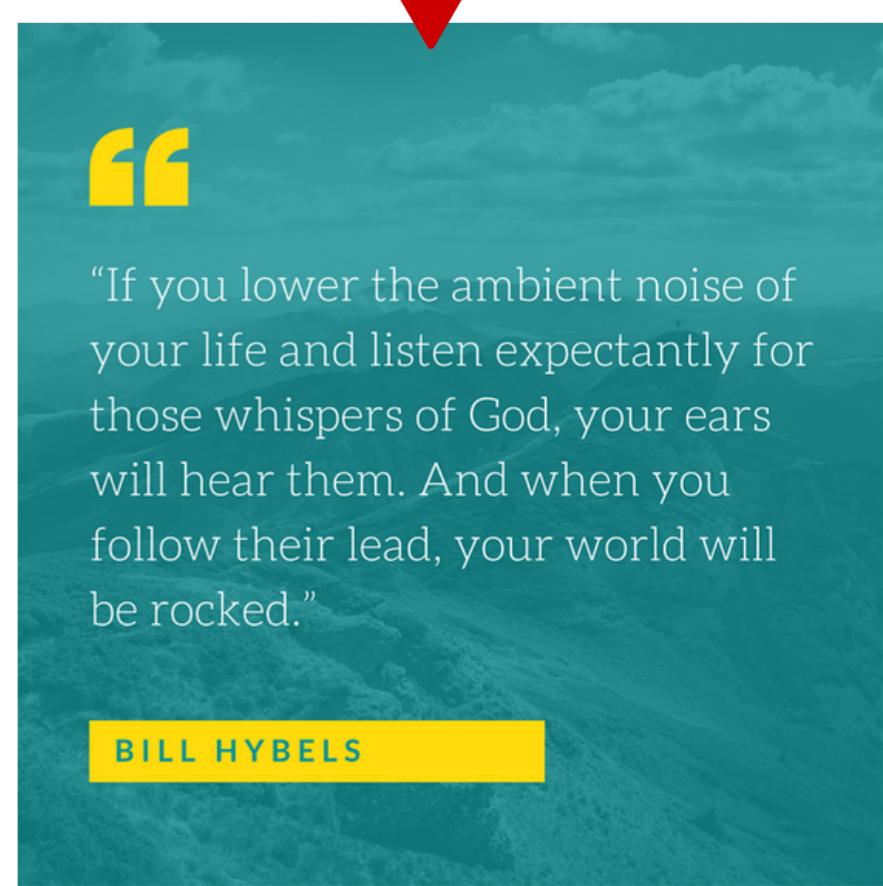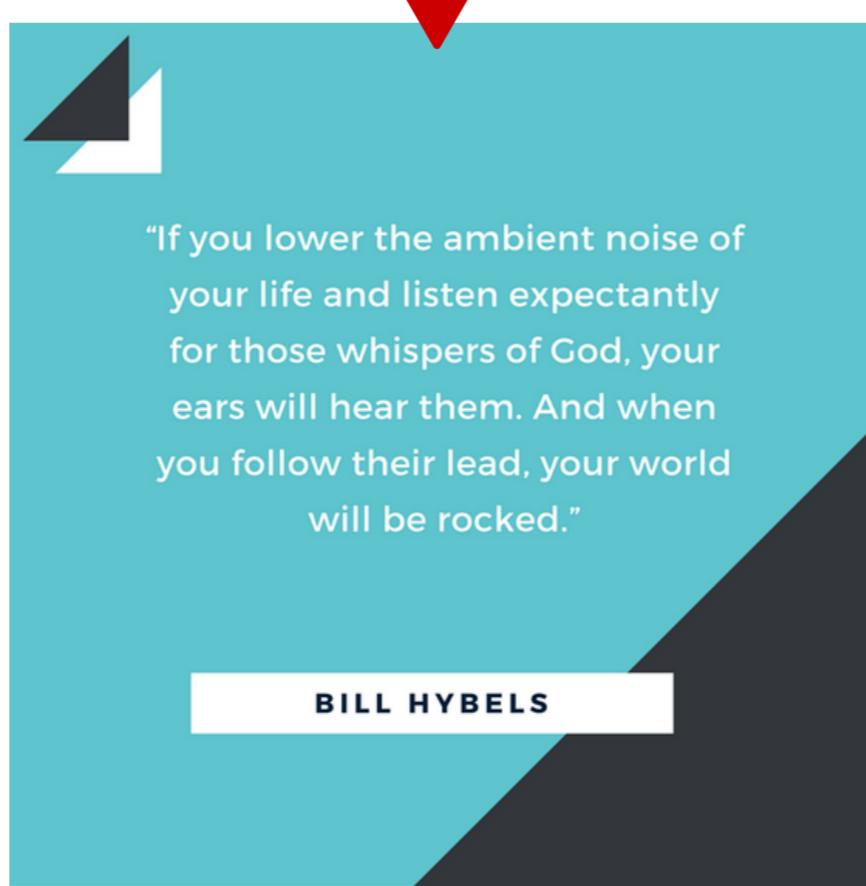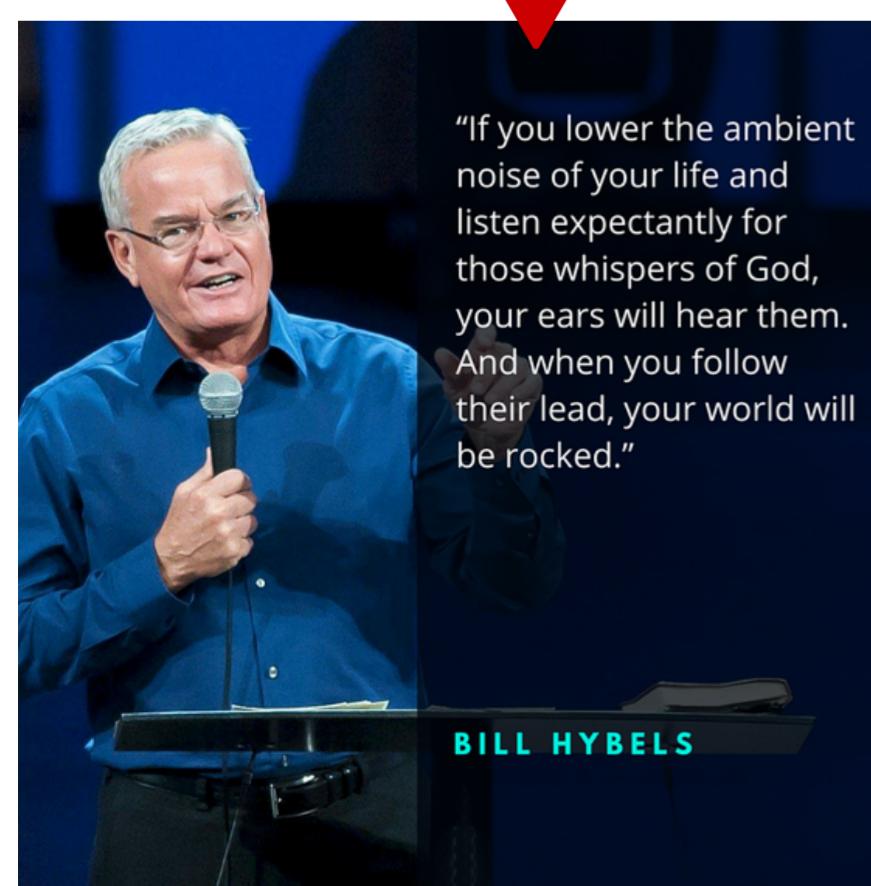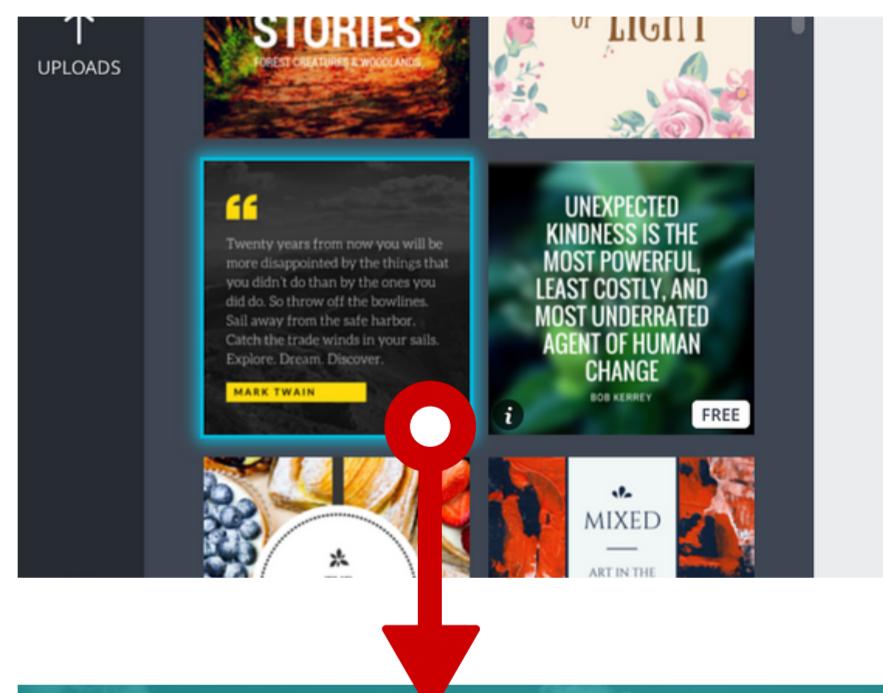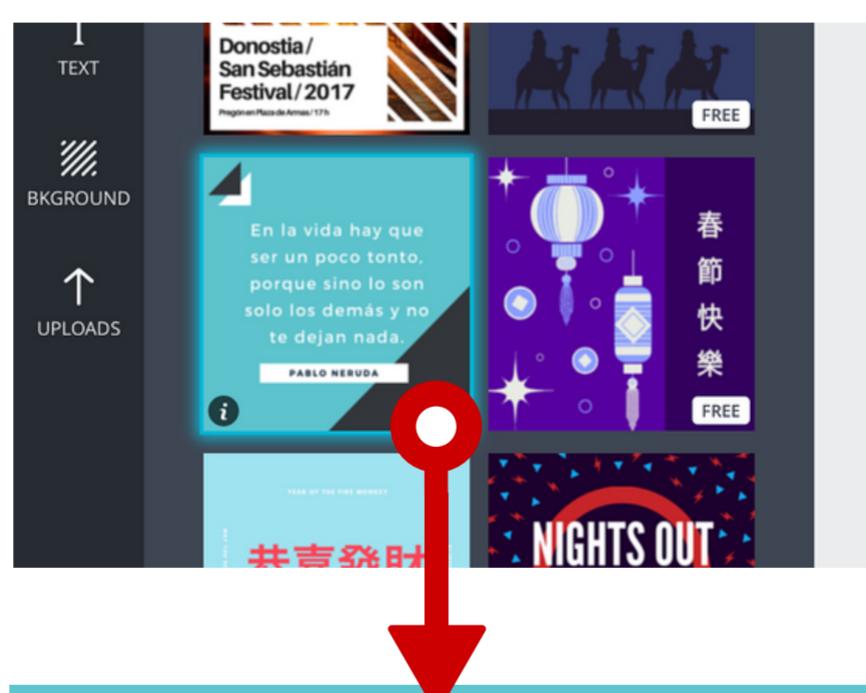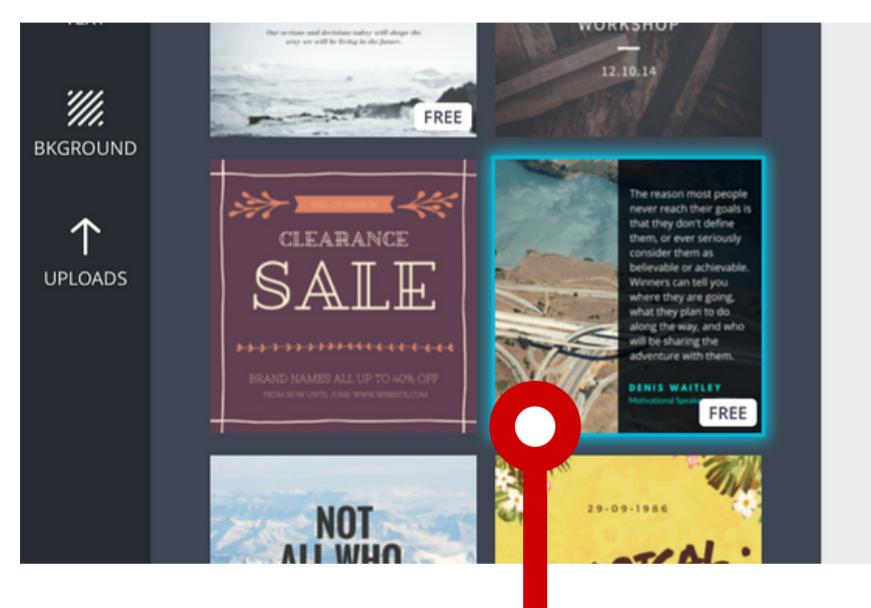
CANVA TIP

There is only one way to align elements in Canva and that's by utilizing the purple guidelines that appear when moving a design element. While the guides appear automatically and snap to alignment, they are a major frustration for anyone who is used to working with alignment buttons that allow you to select mutliple items and align them all at once.

FINAL DESIGN

"If you lower the ambient noise of your life and listen expectantly for those whispers of God, your ears will hear them. And when you follow their lead, your world will be rocked."

Bill Hybels

A great part of graphic design is the fact that there is always more than one way to communicate a message. Below are a few alternatives of how you could share the same message using different Canva templates.

"If you lower the ambient noise of your life and listen expectantly for those whispers of God, your ears will hear them. And when you follow their lead, your world will be rocked."

BILL HYBELS

"If you lower the ambient noise of your life and listen expectantly for those whispers of God, your ears will hear them. And when you follow their lead, your world will be rocked."

BILL HYBELS

"If you lower the ambient noise of your life and listen expectantly for those whispers of God, your ears will hear them. And when you follow their lead, your world will be rocked."

BILL HYBELS

ALIGNMENT

One of the easiest ways to make your design look more professional is to make sure all of the elements are properly aligned. In our project above, the image, text and box are all lined up vertically on center. Likewise, the text and box are horizontally aligned on center as well. Depending on the project, make sure to check if items need to be justified to the right, center, left, top or bottom.

FONT CHOICE AND READABILITY

Having access to a wide variety of fonts is fun. There are so many amazing options to discover and it's easy to get a little too enthusiastic about using them. While fonts are a powerful design tool, they need to be used with care.

- **Limit fonts.** Using a half-dozen fonts in a single graphic is more distracting than helpful. In general, limit yourself to one or two fonts in any given piece of work.

- **Pair fonts well to create contrast.** Fortunately, Canva's text templates do a good job of taking care of this for you. There are many ways you can use two different fonts to separate and emphasize different aspects of your communications piece: thick/thin, bold/regular and serif/sans-serif are all good options.

- **Make them readable.** This is an issue of font size and style. Fonts scaled too small get lost. Artsy, hand-drawn or script fonts can be hard to decipher. Always take time to look at your project in it's actual size to make sure you can read the message. When using text over a photo, this is especially important. Thin, white text would be unreadable on a light, bright photo.

- **Know fonts have personality.** Fonts can be modern, traditional, whimsical, funny, funky or stoic. A bolder, serif font might have an attention grabbing and traditional feel. A thinner, sans-serif font leans subtler and modern. If fonts have strong personalities, then some carry a stigma, too. Take Comic Sans and Papyrus, two font favorites among some churches. Comic Sans can be an easy choice for children's ministry and Papyrus feels like old time scroll writing. Yet designers loath them both due to overuse and unbalanced spacing.

SERVICE TIME IMAGE FOR WEBSITE

SCENARIO

One of the most important pieces of information you need on your website homepage is service times. This project will skip using a template, but instead use the Canva tools for custom design. We'll start with a picture of greeters at church. We're using a stock image as an example, but it's best for you to use an actual photo of your church in action.

STEP 1: CREATE A CUSTOM SIZE DESIGN

From the main Canva menu, select "Use custom dimensions" in the top right hand corner. You'll be prompted to enter width and height. For this project we're using 900 x 450 pixels. While your size will depend on your specific church website, I selected this size because it fits a fairly standard 2:1 ratio.
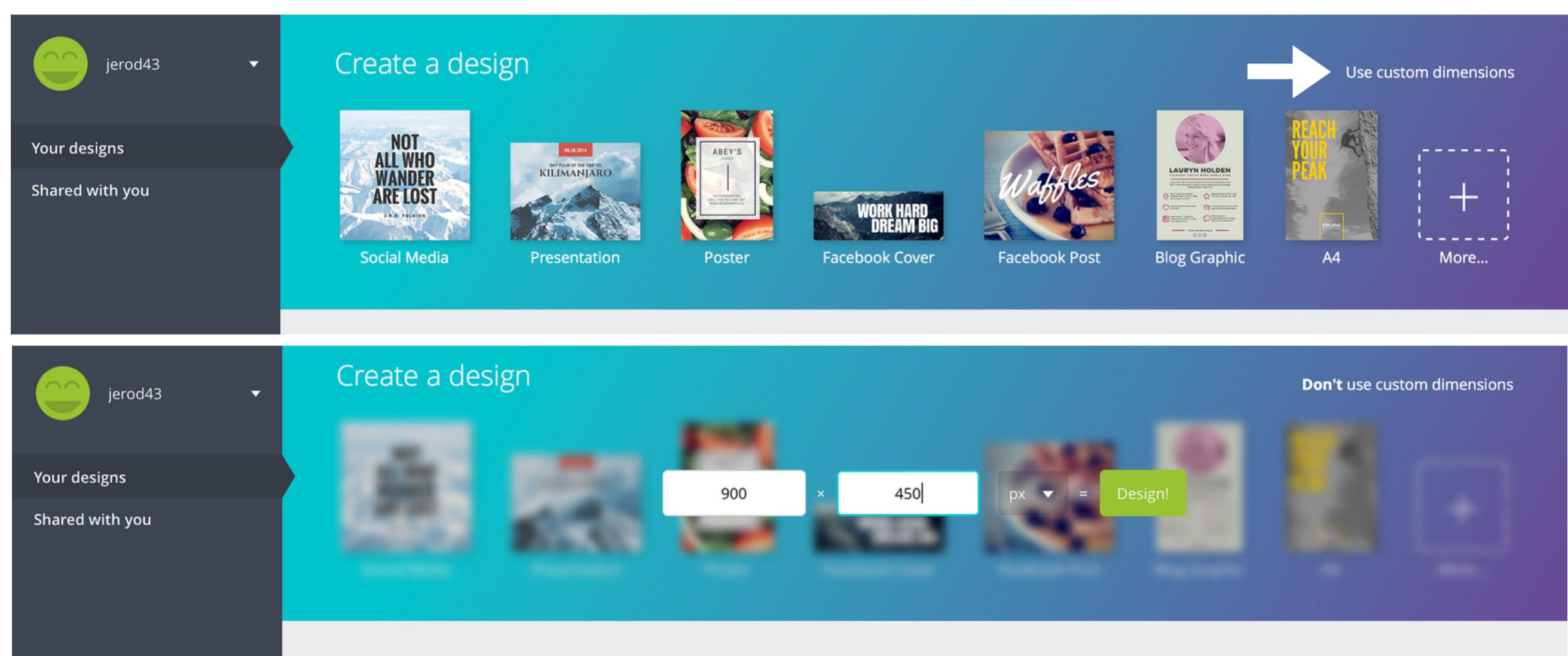

STEP 2: UPLOAD YOUR OWN IMAGE
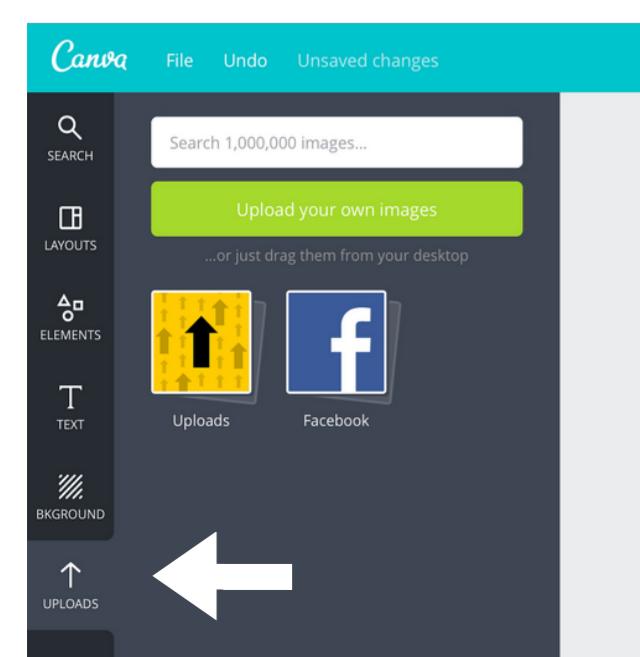
In the menu bar on the left, select "Uploads" and then click on the "upload your own images" button.

Once you've uploaded your image, click on it (or drag it) to add it to your workspace.

STEP 3: RESIZE AND CROP THE IMAGE

You'll notice that when the image is uploaded to the workspace, it didn't fill the complete canvas. To remedy this, click on the picture. Small dots will appear on the corners of the image. Simply grab and drag the dots to adjust the image. If your picture is actually larger than the canvas size, Canva will automatically crop the image for you.
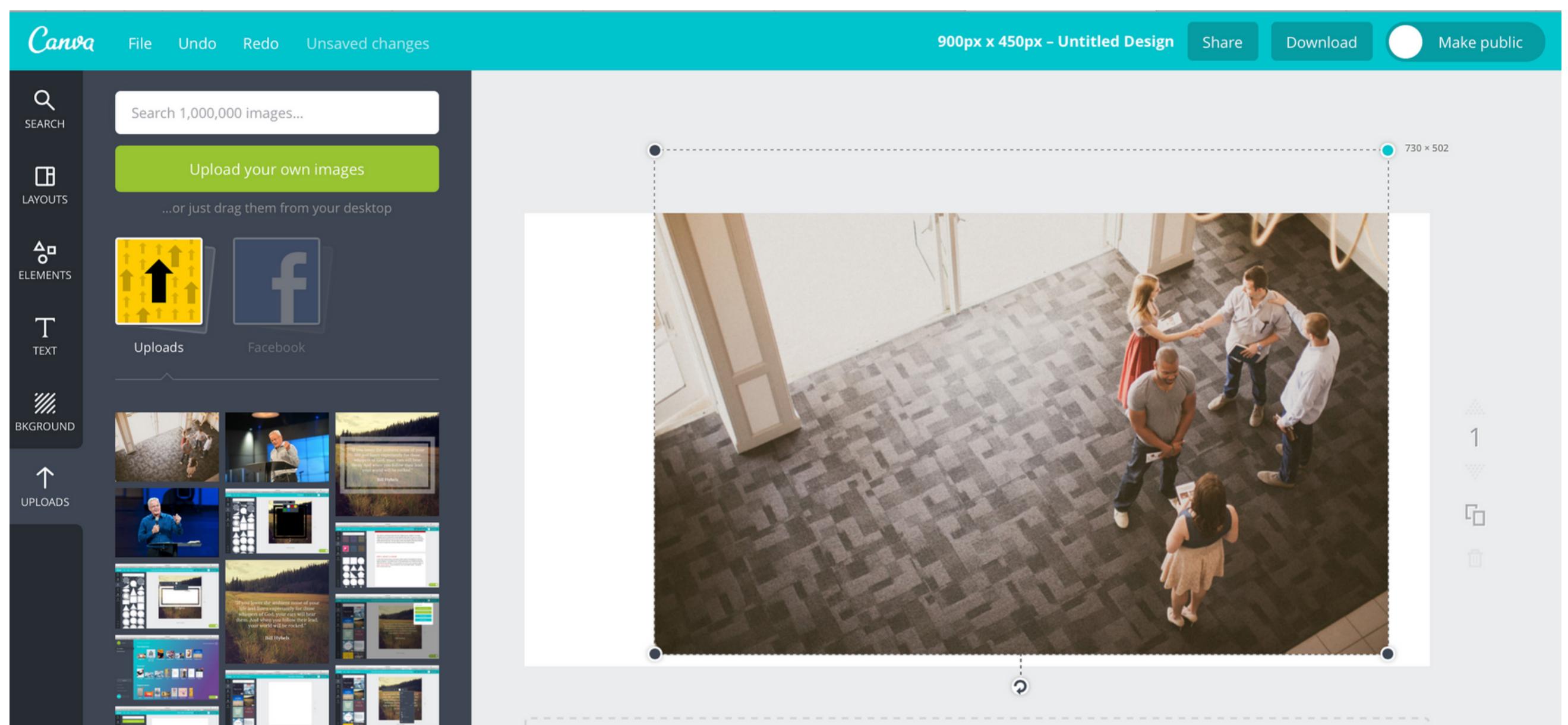

CANVA TIP

In other programs, when resizing an image you might be used to holding down the shift key to prevent the image from becoming distorted. Canva is the opposite. Images will automatically scale, keeping perspective, by default. Holding the shift key will distort and stretch an image.

STEP 4: ADD TEXT

There are a lot of different ways you can add the text to this image in terms of style. Under the "Text" menu, you'll find options for adding single lines of text as well as more complex pre-made designs. For this design, I want to use text with a simple horizontal line to break up the "Service Times" title and the actual times. Let's choose the template "Copenhagen University."
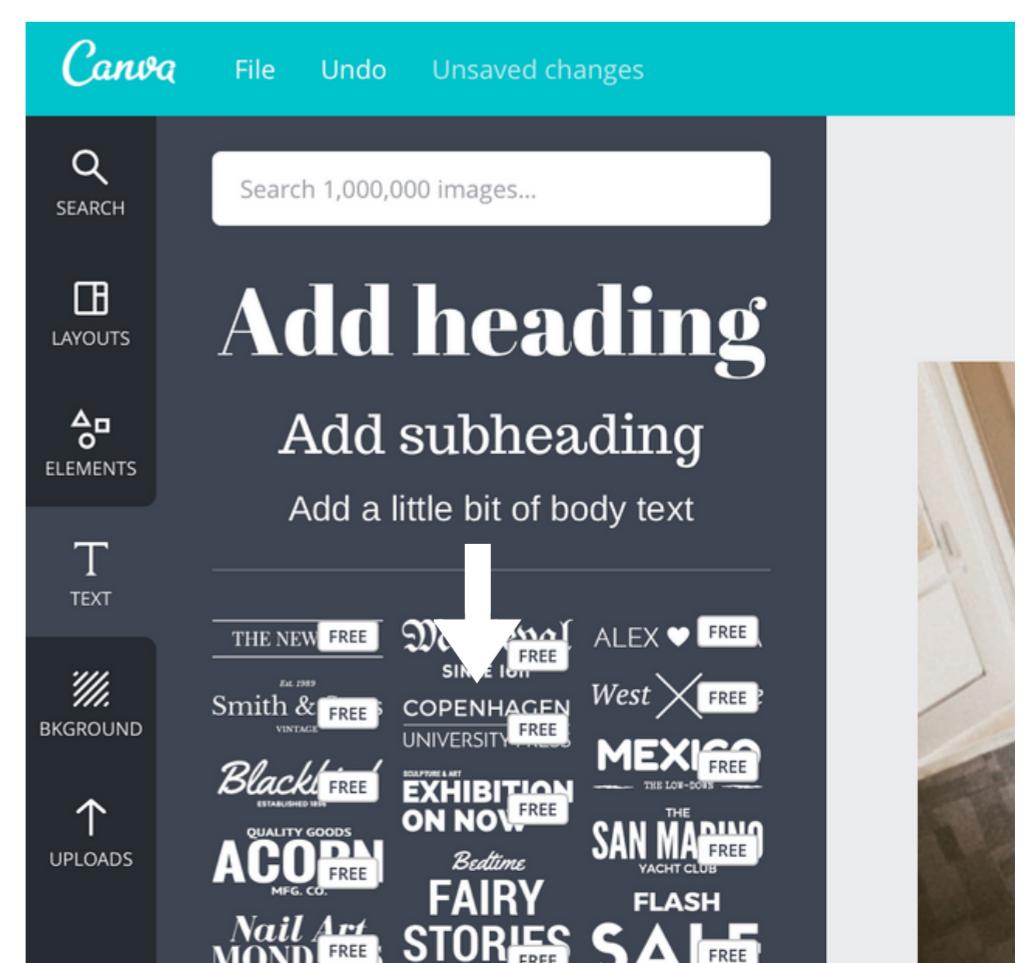
STEP 5: FORMAT AND MOVE THE TEXT

When the text appears on the canvas, it is black, rather large and centered on the image. So, it needs three changes to really maximize the design.

- Change the text color to white so it will be more readable against the grey carpet in the photo
- Shrink the overall size of the text so it doesn't overwhelm the rest of the image
- Move the text to the lower left corner of the image

FINAL DESIGN
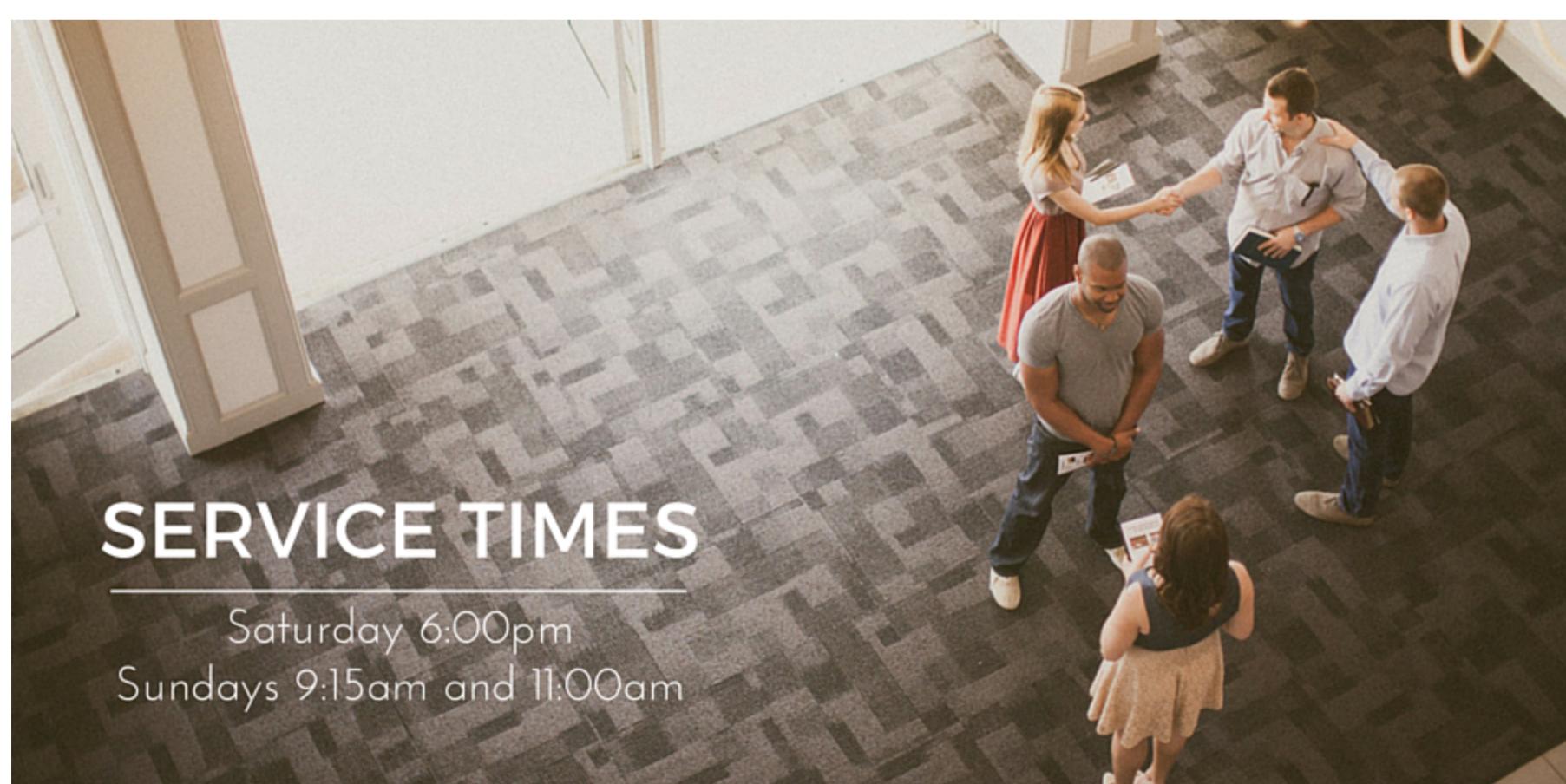
DESIGN HIERARCHY

Think of a newspaper. There's a bold headline followed by an image. Then there can be a sub-headline before diving into the smaller print of the article. This is a prime example of design hierarchy. The easiest way to create a hierarchy is through varying font sizes and weights. There are two main reasons design hierarchy matters.

- **It creates levels of importance.** Bigger sized text equals more important information. Also, the text up top is likely to be read before the words below it. Lastly, a powerful image in the right spot will emphasize the point your copy is trying to make. When crafting your message, think through the key points and how you can graphically support it.

- **It guides a user through the design.** If you're intentional about creating a hierarchy, certain elements will draw the attention of the user's eye. Just like you look at a newspaper headline and image before reading the article, a well-crafted church handout or website graphic can do the same.

OPEN SPACE AND SIMPLICITY

Just like a clear message helps someone understand what you're communicating, simple design will help you say more with less.

- **You don't have to use every design tool available.** A great aspect of Canva is that it has so many built-in features to help you more easily create art. However, since these features are so easily accessible, it can be temping to use them too often. Limit effects to only what's right for your project. Using too many at once hides your message and confuses users.

- **Let elements breathe.** You don't have to fill the whole space. If you find yourself shrinking large amounts of text to fit into a small space or wondering where you're going to add another logo, it's time to pull back on the design elements. Leaving open space, or white space, lets your audience see your message more easily.

- **Don't overwork a piece.** One of the easiest ways to clutter a design is to spend too much time working on it. The urge to continually tweak usually adds complexity. Use an editor's eye to make sure your design meets the project goals and then finalize it.

GRIDS

Think of grids as a way to decide where you'll put various elements of your design so that it looks balanced. You'll often hear the term "rule of thirds" especially in photography. Three vertical and horizontal lines create nine boxes on an image. Place your main subject close to where those lines intersect (or on one of those lines). The theory is this: offset images are more appealing to the eye.

In our service times project, we went a little simpler by splitting the image in halves. The greeters in the photo occupied the right half and we centered the text on the left half.

SERVICE TIMES
Saturday 6:00pm
Sundays 9:15am and 11:00am
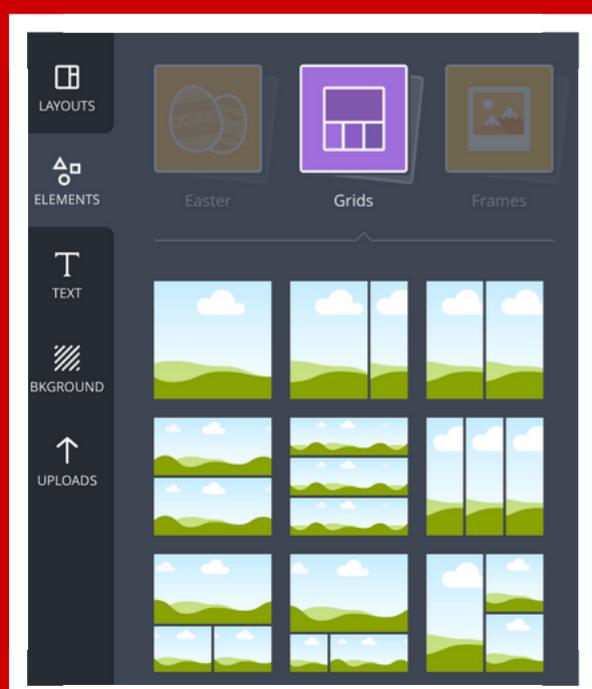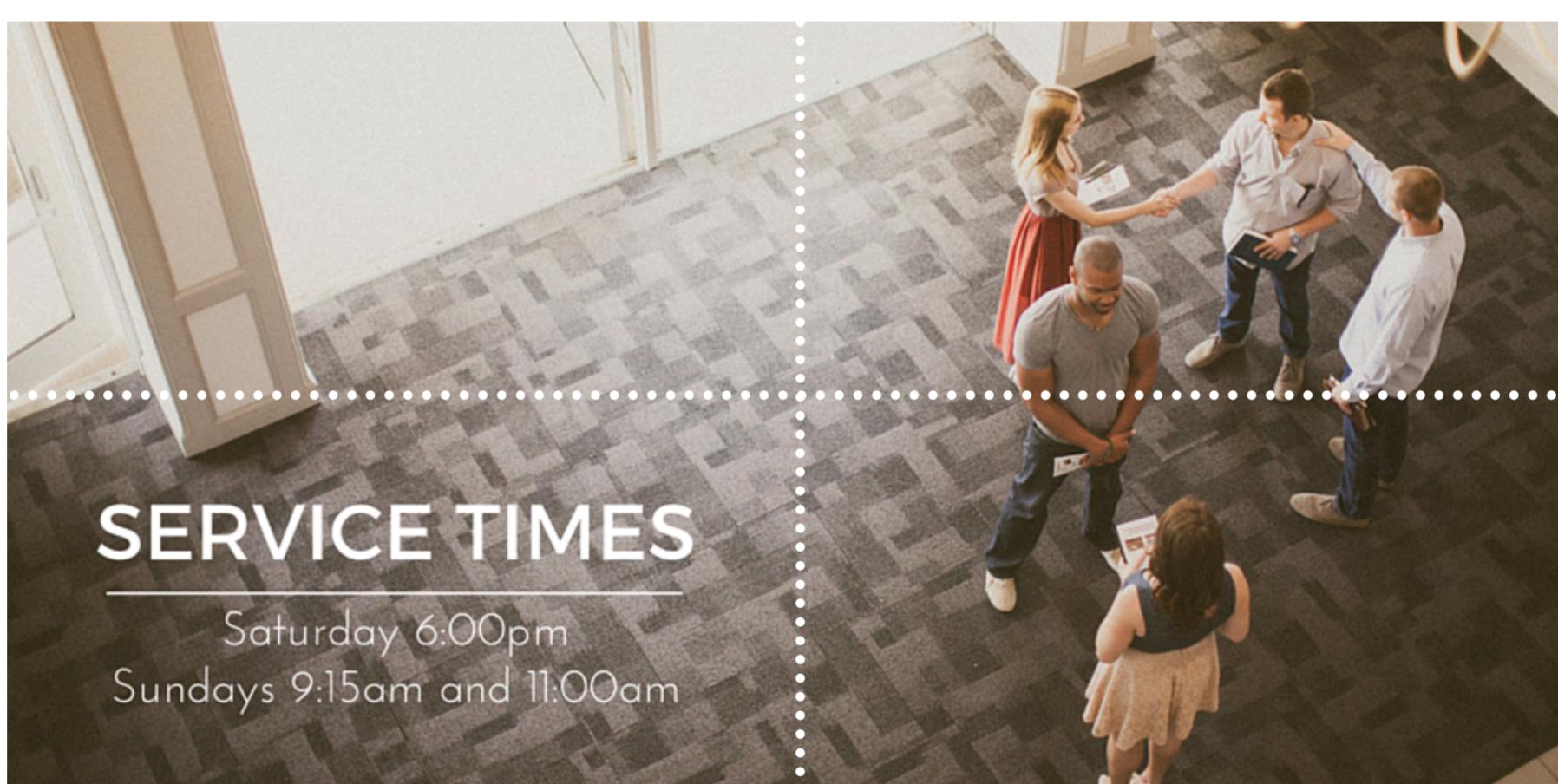
CANVA TIP

There is a built-in "Grids" tool in the "Element" section where you can choose templates that are already setup with ideal spacing. All you have to do is click on a section to add an image, color box, text or other design element. These grids also appear at the bottom of the "Layouts" section.

There are always multiple approaches to sharing a message. Let's say you want to use the same picture of greeters (because it not only shows what your building looks like inside, but also communicates that you're a welcoming place), but you want the text to make a bolder statement. Here is an alternative that uses the same design principles as the previous version, but has a little different look.
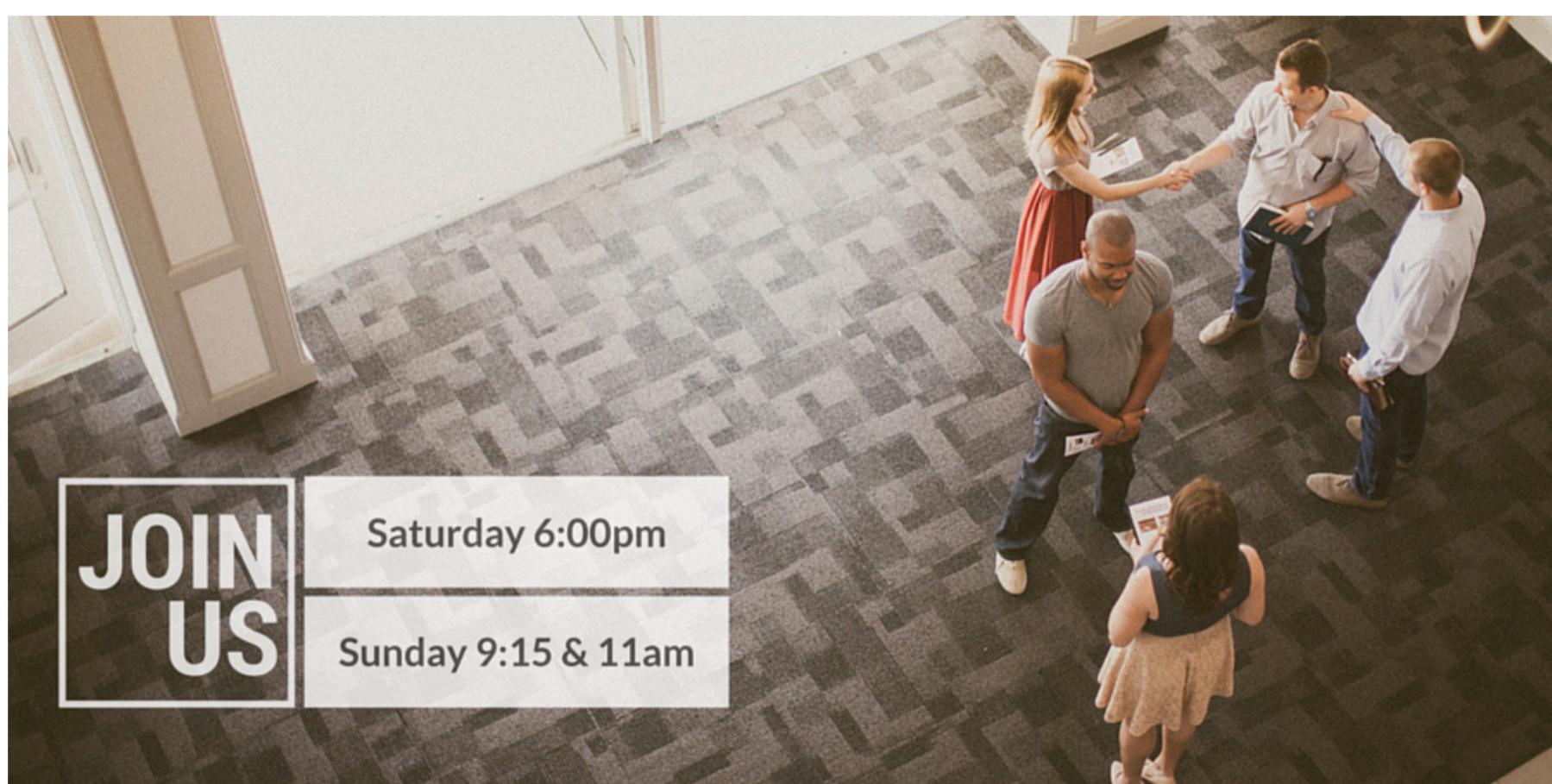

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Here's how we created this design starting with the same base image.

From the "Text" section, choose the "Hello, Hello" template. Adjust the size. Change the color to white and move transparency to 80.

Add the service times and change the font color to a gray that matches part of carpet in the image. (Since there isn't an eyedropper color selector, you have to use your best judgement on color matching.)
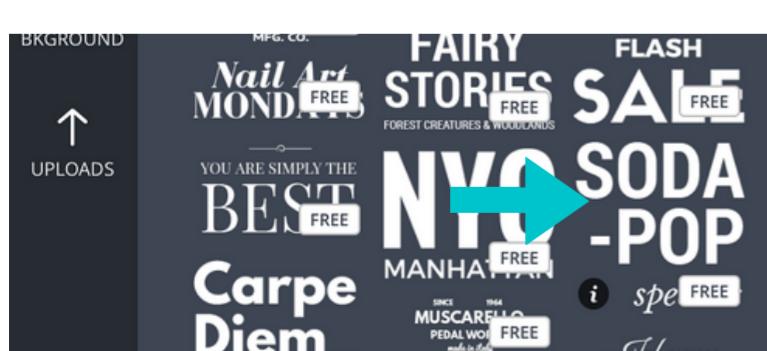
Then, choose a section text template called "Soda Pop" and type in "Join Us." In the "Elements" section, choose "Shapes" and use the outlined square tool. Adjust the size so the top and bottom align with the service time boxes. Make the text and box white with 80% transparency to match the rest of the design.
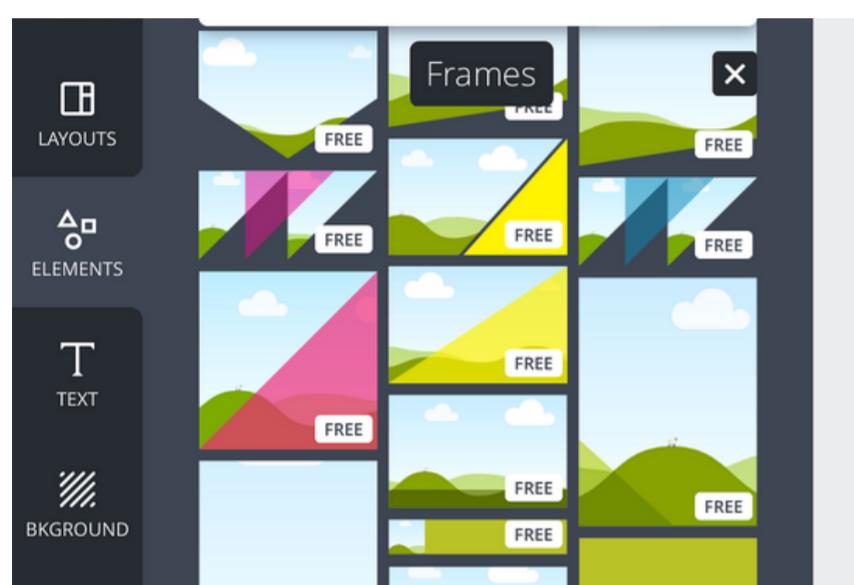
ADDITIONAL TOOLS

MORE CANVA FEATURES

While we covered a fair number of features in the two design tutorials, Canva has other tools we didn't use. Here's a quick overview.

FRAMES

The "Frames" feature in the "Elements" section lets you easily add a picture to an existing template. For example, there are options that put a shape over an image, or even a mobile phone graphic, where you can add an image to the screen.

ILLUSTRATIONS AND ICONS
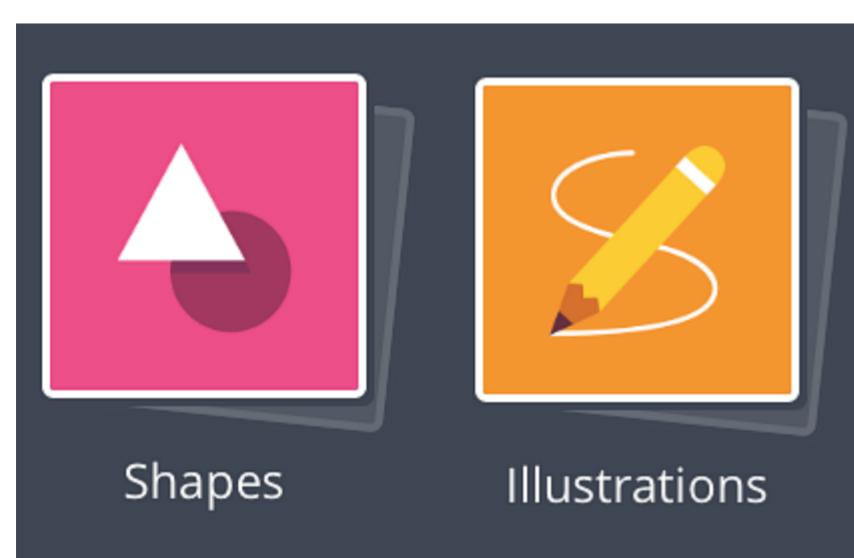
Sometimes a simple icon or illustration can help you more clearly communicate your message. This style of design is also popular in current trends. In the "Elements" sections, you'll find the tools "Icons" and "Illustrations." Many are free and others can be purchased.

PHOTOS

There are free stock images available in Canva as well as many additional images available for a small fee. While they might be handy for your design, always remember it's better to show images of your actual church and members whenever possible to give a realistic view of who you are. The "Photos" tool is in the "Elements" section.

CHARTS
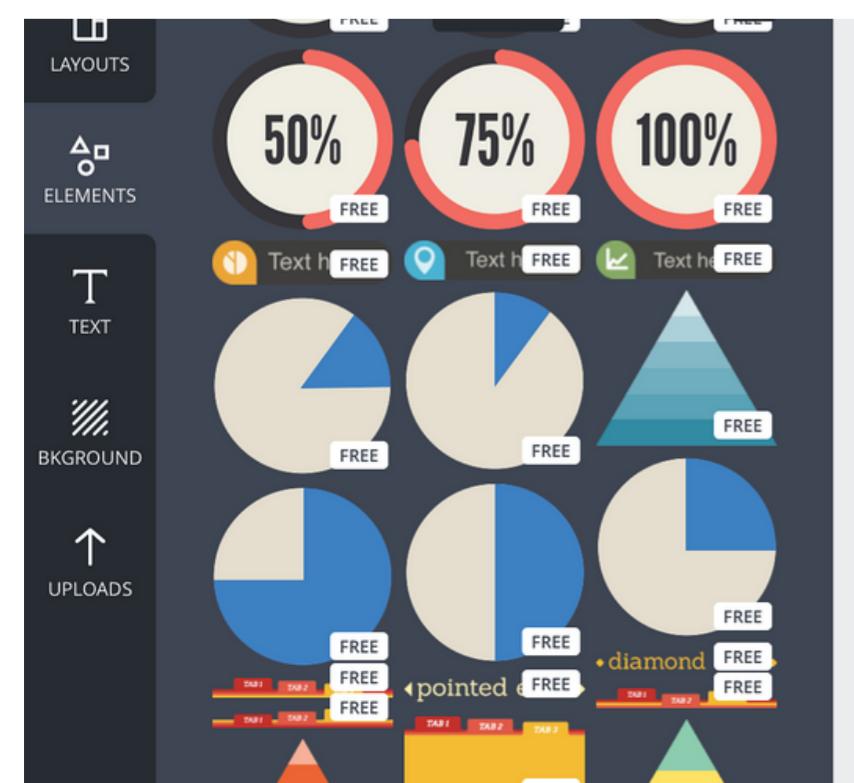
Whether it's an infographic or an illustration for an annual report, the "Charts" section provides a wide variety of templates that you can use to make numbers easier to consume. You'll find this feature in the "Elements" section

CONCLUSION

FEED YOUR CREATIVE SPIRIT

Canva can help designers of any skill level create professional looking graphics. But Canva alone cannot fuel your day-to-day design work. So, take the time to find delight in great design.

Start by looking at what other churches and ministries are doing, but be sure to jump out of the religious bubble at times too.

Spend time following your favorite brands. Peruse online portfolios of other designers or even walk down the street and just look around. These simple acts will keep you up-to-date with trends, introduce you to styles you've never seen and hopefully provide you with an inspirational spark for your next project.

Inspiration is all around you. The key is to intentionally schedule time to feed your creative spirit. Once you've done that, Canva can help you turn inspiration into reality.

PREMIUM CANVA FOR WORK

FREE FOR NON-PROFITS

Canva for Work is a paid, advanced version of the online design software which adds features like building brand templates, uploading custom fonts, better organization options, team tools and more. Non-profits can get access for free at: https://goo.gl/hwCc8x

JEROD CLARK

Jerod is the Church Juice Project Manager. Before launching Church Juice in 2007, Jerod spent five years as a local television news reporter and anchor. While working in TV, Jerod met his wife Sarah, who was also a journalist. Now they live in the Chicago area and love to travel the world together.

CHURCH JUICE

At Church Juice, we're all about helping churches communicate better with their congregations and community. Get more free resources to energize your church's websites, social media, branding, and marketing at www.churchjuice.com.

REFRAME MEDIA

Church Juice is a production of ReFrame Media, the English-language mission of Back to God Ministries International. We produce a family of resources online and on the air, all in order to invite you to see in a new way what God is already doing in your life. God restores and renews, and when God's story enters into your life, your whole life is reframed by the gospel.