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# About this guide

The holidays are upon us, and gift giving season means new gear for you or a loved one — like your lovable Church Photographers Podcast cohosts.

In this guide, we're going to cover not only what gear to buy, but *how* to buy gear — to help you think through what camera bodies, lenses, and accessories best fit your needs and your budget.

We consulted with ~~fanboys~~ experts who shoot with each of four major brands — Nikon, Canon, Sony, and FujiFilm — to put together their recommendations for budgets of \$500, \$1,000, \$2,500, and \$5,000.

## The Legal Mumbo Jumbo

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Links to retailers may include affiliate links, which means we get a small commission if you click through and make a purchase at no extra cost to you. Shopping with our links supports our work and helps us bring you more great free content.

Prices included in this guide are for reference only and may have changed since publication.





SECTION 01

# GEAR BUYING TIPS



# Crop or Full Frame?

Crop vs. Full Frame refers to the physical size of the camera's sensor — not necessarily the resolution. Crop, or APS-C, sensors are smaller than their full frame counterparts.

While it's best to use lenses that were designed for the body you're shooting with, on supported camera bodies, full frame lenses can usually be used on a crop sensor body and vice versa. On a compatible full frame body set to crop mode, the image will only take up part of the sensor with a lower resolution. On a crop sensor body with a full frame lens, the image will appear zoomed in.

## WHY BUY CROP?

- Most entry level cameras have APS-C sensors.
- Lenses for crop sensors are significantly less expensive.
- You can identify a crop sensor lens with the letters DX (Nikon), EF-S (Canon), DC (Sigma), or Di II (Tamron).

## WHY BUY FULL FRAME?

- Modern full frame bodies generally have better performance in terms of low light performance, autofocus, etc.
- Most professional DSLR and mirrorless photographers rely on full frame gear for quality and performance.
- Full frame lenses can be identified with the letters FX (Nikon), EF (Canon), DG (Sigma), or Di (Tamron).

# DSLR or Mirrorless?

DSLR cameras use a mirror to reflect the image through the lens to the viewfinder. When the shutter clicks, the mirror lifts up and the sensor captures the image. Mirrorless cameras (obviously) lack the mirror, instead relaying the image to the viewfinder with an electronic screen.

## WHY BUY DSLR?

- DSLRs are generally preferred by photographers.
- Some photographers prefer the optical viewfinder of the DSLR over the electronic viewfinder of mirrorless cameras.
- DSLRs tend to have longer battery life, since they don't rely on an LCD screen to see through the lens.
- DSLRs have a wider range of accessories available.

## WHY BUY MIRRORLESS?

- Mirrorless cameras have become popular for photographers who also shoot video. They tend to have better autofocus and stabilization features.
- Mirrorless cameras are smaller and more compact.
- Mirrorless cameras have a silent shutter mode, which makes them less disruptive in a worship environment. This mode can, however, occasionally cause banding issues in certain lighting setups or with projectors and LED panels.





# Should I buy new or used?

Much like when buying a vehicle, you can get a lot more for your budget by [buying used gear](#). When I (Rob) invested in full frame gear, I bought a used body — and it has continued to be a workhorse in my camera bag.

In general, remember that **glass (lenses) retains its value while bodies often do not**. Camera bodies and the electronics inside them will come and go, but lenses can last for decades with care. Investing in used gear can be a great option if you know what to look for.

## TIPS FOR BUYING USED BODIES

- Look for bodies with a low shutter count — like mileage on a used car. Use Google to find out how many clicks a shutter usually lasts for the model you're considering.
- Your local camera shop can help determine the shutter count for a used camera you're considering.
- [Rent before you buy](#) to take some risk out of your investment.

## TIPS FOR BUYING USED LENSES

- Visit your local camera shop. They'll often have a wide variety of used inventory — and they will generally inspect a lens before they accept it so you can be more confident buying.
- Be sure to try a lens on your body before buying. Inspect for scratches, scuffs, or mold/mildew inside the lens.

# Which brand do I choose?

There are a number of manufacturers out there, and each one has die-hard fans. In this guide, we'll feature recommendations for gear from four major manufacturers — Nikon, Canon, Sony, and Fujifilm.

In each section, our expert who contributed gear for that manufacturer will share why they love that brand.

## BUYING THIRD PARTY GEAR

Third party lens manufacturers — such as Sigma and Tamron — produce high quality lenses at a fraction of the price of name brand glass.

I (Rob) am personally a huge fan of two types of third party lenses.

1. **Sigma ART.** My Sigma ART 24-105mm f4 lens is the sharpest in my kit, and a fantastic versatile lens for landscapes to portraits.
2. **Tamron G2 Lenses.** G2 refers to Tamron's second generation of lens stabilization, and it is phenomenal. My Tamron 70-200mm f2.8 G2 lens is my go-to low-light zoom lens.

Sigma and Tamron both offer docks to connect your lens to your computer and update the lens' firmware for continued compatibility with future bodies from name brand manufacturers.

Be wary about very cheap third party lenses from brands you don't recognize; they'll often lack autofocus or have poor quality glass.





ENJOYING THIS CONTENT?

# SHOW US SOME LOVE.

We'll get back to our regularly scheduled programming in a moment. First, would you consider one of these three ways of supporting our work?

We couldn't do what we do without you!



**Rob Laughter**  
Founder, Church Photographers

1

## Buy some gear.

We earn a small (2% to 5%) commission at no extra cost to you when you purchase through our referral links in this guide.

*Keep reading to get to the goods!*

2

## Buy us a coffee.

Become a **patron** on Patreon for as little as \$5 to keep us fueled up to keep pumping out these free resources — and to help cover some of our expenses.

[SIGN ME UP](#)

3

## Say “thanks.”

Jump on over to our Facebook or Instagram communities to give us a follow and leave an encouraging note.

[FACEBOOK](#)

[INSTAGRAM](#)

Thanks for your support!



**Connor Strickland**  
Producer / Co-host  
The Church Photographers Podcast



SECTION 02

GEAR GUIDES

# FOUR MAJOR BRANDS.

Nikon, Canon, Sony, FujiFilm.

# FOUR BUDGET RANGES.

\$500, \$1000, \$2500, \$5000.



# Nikon® Gear Guide

## Your Nikon gear expert: Rob Laughter

Rob got his start as an events and sports photographer during college, shooting for his college newspaper and yearbook. He now serves as the Director of Digital at The Summit Church where he leads a team of 40 photographers, and recently started a production company for bands and musicians.

*Follow Rob on Instagram at @roblaughter.*



## In Rob's Words: Why Nikon?

“Like most fanboys, I’m a Nikon guy because that’s what I started on, and it’s what I’ve grown to like. When I started shooting in college, my photo editor tossed a Nikon D2X and 300mm f/2.8 lens in my hands and sent me out the door.

“When it came time to get my own gear, I went for what I knew. Now when I think Nikon, I think *reliability*. More than 15 years behind the lens and my Nikon gear has never let me down. Nikon’s new mirrorless options are solid options for both photo and video — and I’m excited for the future of the brand.”

# NIKON \$500 budget

Nikon D5600 w/ Kit 18-55mm Lens

\$499 on sale [Amazon](#)



# NIKON \$1,000 budget

Nikon D7500 (Body Only)

\$796 [Amazon](#)



Nikon 50mm f/1.8 G

\$176 [Amazon](#)



**Rob says:** "At \$500, you're stuck with a crop sensor body and cheap lens, but the D5600 is capable body in its class."



**Rob says:** "For \$1k, you can pick up a top of the line crop sensor body and the 'nifty fifty,' a versatile low-light lens."

# NIKON \$2,500 budget

Nikon D750 (Body Only)

\$1,196 [Amazon](#)



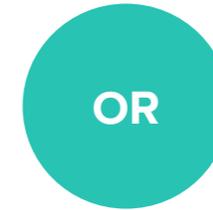
Nikon 50mm f/1.8 G

\$176 [Amazon](#)



Tamron 70-200mm f2.8 G2

\$1,199 [Amazon](#)



Sigma ART 24-105mm f4

\$756 [Amazon](#)

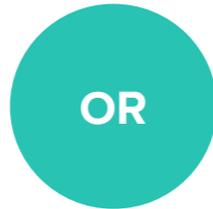


**Rob says:** "The D750 is a great starter full-frame body — it's still my workhorse. Also suitable for video. Add the 70-200mm Tamron lens for amazing worship shots!"

# NIKON \$5,000 budget

Nikon Z7 Body w/ FTZ

\$2,696 [Amazon](#)



Nikon D850 (Body Only)

\$2,796 [Amazon](#)



Tamron 70-200mm f2.8 G2

\$1,199 [Amazon](#)



Tamron 24-70mm f2.8 G2

\$1,099 [Amazon](#)



**Rob says:** "At \$5k, you can choose from Nikon's flagship mirrorless, the Z7, or their professional level DSLR, the D850. Add in a 24-70mm and 70-200mm to shoot wide, close, and everywhere in between."



# Canon® Gear Guide



## Your Canon gear expert: Connor

Connor is a video guy first — but we don't hold that against him. He's the founder of Dogwood Creative Co. and The Simple Church Co., and co-host of the Church Photographers Podcast..

*Follow Connor on Instagram at @connorstrickland.*

## In Connor's Words: Why Canon?

“The first camera I ever shot with was a Canon. When it came time to buy my first camera, I picked up the Canon t3. I used that camera for 4 years and landed my first year worth of paying clients with nothing but my Canon t3, kit lens, and a \$100 canon 50mm lens.

“Over the years, I've used Panasonic and Sony gear, but I prefer to use Canon bodies and glass because of the true color, sharpness, and functionality.”

# CANON \$500 budget

Canon EOS Rebel T6 Kit

\$399 [Amazon](#)



# CANON \$1,000 budget

Canon 70D Kit

\$854 [Amazon](#)



Canon EF 50mm f/1.8

\$125 [Amazon](#)



**Connor says:** "My first camera was a Rebel, and I got my first paying clients with entry level gear. Don't be afraid to use it!"



**Connor says:** "With a \$1k budget, you can upgrade to a better body. Be sure to get that nifty-fifty 50mm lens for low light."

# CANON \$2,500 budget

Canon EOS 6D Mark II (Body Only)

\$1,199 [Amazon](#)



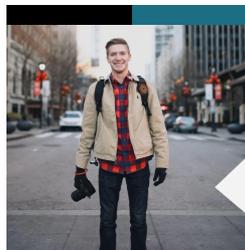
Canon EF 50mm f/1.8

\$125 [Amazon](#)



Canon EF 70-200mm f/4L

\$1,199 [Amazon](#)



**Connor says:** "At \$2500, you can go full-frame and start investing in additional lenses that will help you shoot in your worship auditorium."

# CANON \$5,000 budget

Canon EOS 5D Mark IV

\$2,499 [Amazon](#)



Canon EOS R w/ 24-105mm F/4L

\$2,699 [Amazon](#)



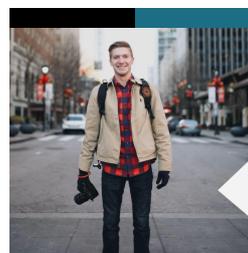
Canon EF 24-70mm f/2.8L

\$1,599 [Amazon](#)



Canon EF 70-200mm f/4L

\$1,199 [Amazon](#)



**Connor says:** "\$5k gives you even more choices. Choose between pro DSLR or mirrorless gear, and "besure to invest in good glass when you can.



# SONY Gear Guide



## Your Sony gear expert: Austin

Austin started his career as a photographer and videographer 6 years ago, working first as a freelancer, then for a wedding photo/film company. He now works full time on the creative/video team at The Summit Church.

*Follow Austin on Instagram at @franks\_austin.*

## In Austin's Words: Why Sony?

"I've been using Sony for 5 years now and absolutely love them. I was first introduced by a guy named Chris Burkard who does photo/video work for companies like Apple, North Face, Patagonia, and more.

"He sold me on it when I found out he photographed the Macbook wallpapers with an a6000. Sony's an incredible lightweight mirrorless option that quick and easy to use, ideal for travel and incredibly powerful."

# SONY \$500 budget

Sony Alpha a6000 w/ 16-50mm Kit Lens

\$429 [Amazon](#)



# SONY \$1,000 budget

Sony Alpha a6400 w/ 16-50mm Kit Lens

\$998 [Amazon](#)



**Austin says:** "For both photo and video. This crop sensor body gets you 24MP still resolution and 1080p video."



**Austin says:** "For \$1k, you upgrade to the a6400, which shoots improved stills and 4K video."

# SONY \$2,500 budget

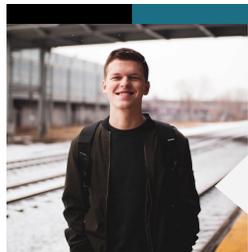
Sony a7 III w/ 28-70mm Lens

\$2,198 [Amazon](#)



Sony 50mm F1.8

\$248 [Amazon](#)



**Austin says:** "This is an incredible full frame camera with insanely crisp photos and video. Shop around to see if you can find a retailer offering an accessory bundle for added value."

# SONY \$5,000 budget

Sony a7 III w/ 28-70mm Lens

\$2,198 [Amazon](#)



Sony 35mm f/1.8

\$473 [Amazon](#)



Sony 50mm f/1.8

\$248 [Amazon](#)



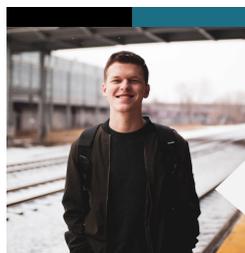
Sony 85mm f/1.8

\$598 [Amazon](#)



Sony 70-200mm f/4.0

\$1,237 [Amazon](#)



**Austin says:** "For \$5k, pick up the ultra-sharp Sony a7iii with a wide variety of lenses — from portraits to close ups."

# FUJIFILM Gear Guide

## Your Fujifilm gear expert: Alin

Alin picked up a camera to help him market his side hustle and he's been hooked since. In the last 5 years, he's shot weddings, concerts, events, portrait sessions, product photography, and digital advertising. Alin now serves full time at 12Stone Church in Atlanta, Georgia as the Director of Social & Digital Media.

*Follow Alin on Instagram at @alindragu.*



## In Alin's Words: Why Fujifilm?

"I'm a huge advocate of using what inspires you and Fujifilm does just that in my hands. I picked up a Fuji because I wanted a smaller form factor camera and once I put my hands on it, I was hooked.

"Fujifilm produces incredibly sharp glass that doesn't break the bank, out of this world color science, and the ability to shoot photo & video at a professional level with one camera at a price that is still mind-blowing to me.

"Another benefit to the Fuji brand that is big to me is all the manual controls being on the camera making changing things up as fast and easy."



# FUJI \$500 budget

Fujifilm X-T100 w/ 15-45mm Lens

\$499 [Amazon](#)



# FUJI \$1,000 budget

Fujifilm X-T30 w/ 15-45mm Lens

\$899 [Amazon](#)



**Alin says:** "24.2MP. Incredible Bluetooth technology. Video has continuous autofocus. Flip out LCD screen for vlogging."



**Alin says:** "26.1MP. 4K Video. Great autofocus. Bluetooth technology. Includes 120FPS in 1080 for smooth B-roll."

# FUJI \$2,500 budget

Fujifilm X-T3

\$1,299 [Amazon](#)



Fujinon XF35mm f/2

\$399 [Amazon](#)



Fujinon XF90mm f/2

\$849 [Amazon](#)



**Alin says:** "Incredible stills & video. Amazing in low light. Includes EVF. 3-Axis tilt screen. Dual SD card slots. The 35mm lens makes for flattering portraiture while the 90mm is one of the sharpest lenses with richest colors on the market of any brand."

# FUJI \$5,000 budget

Fujifilm X-T3

\$1,299 [Amazon](#)



Fujinon XF16-55mm f/2.8

\$999 [Amazon](#)



Fujinon XF56mm f/1.2

\$899 [Amazon](#)



Fujinon XF50-140mm f/2.8

\$1,399 [Amazon](#)



Fujifilm VG-XT3 Battery Grip

\$329 [Amazon](#)



**Alin says:** "For \$5k, get the incredible stills and video of the X-T3 plus a ton of sharp glass. The 56mm f/1.2 is key for low light and bokeh, and the battery grip gives you three batteries in one camera to make up for Fuji's poor battery life."



SECTION 03

# ACCESSORIES

# THIS IS THE GEAR YOU'RE LOOKING FOR.

(That was from Star Wars\*.)



\* That was from Tommy Boy.

# STORAGE & POWER

There are two things you can't run out of when you're out on a shoot — storage and power. If you do, you're toast.

Whether you're buying for yourself or for a loved one, we're here to help you get the best gear for the job. Keep yourself shooting longer with these accessories.

## TIPS FOR BUYING

Not all storage and power solutions are created equally.

1. Fast media is a must. Cheaper SD cards may save some dough, but will also leave you in a bind if they can't write quickly enough. Our recommendation, the SanDisk Extreme Pro, is the best balance of quality and price.
2. In addition to these accessories, be sure to stock up on extra batteries — and perhaps a mobile charger — for your camera body. If you're able, shell out a few extra bucks for name brand over third party batteries. Name brand tends to last up to 50% longer.



Indicates Church Photographers Recommended Gear



Indicates great value for smaller budgets.

## SanDisk Extreme Pro SD 128GB

\$39 [Amazon](#)

*Fastest and best value SD cards on the market.*



## LaCie DJI Copilot 2TB

\$299 [Amazon](#)

*Dump SD cards on the go.*



## RAVPower 32000mAh Battery Pack

\$72 [Amazon](#)

*High capacity USB power bank for mobile charging.*



## Duracell Procell AA - 24 Pack

\$9 [Amazon](#)

*You can never have enough batteries.*



# TRIPODS

Whether you're shooting portraits, locking down a camera in the back of your worship center, or needing some extra stability to reduce camera shake in low light, a quality tripod can help you produce better images.

## TIPS FOR BUYING

Avoid bargain tripods with lightweight legs and low quality tripod heads. They're more trouble than they're worth.

1. Many tripods can be converted into a monopod. These products will help you get some extra bang for your buck.
2. Consider your shooting style when selecting a tripod. If you travel or move around a lot, you may want to sacrifice some stability to get a travel model.
3. No room for a tripod? Consider an innovative solution such as the Platypod or a Gorillapod.



Indicates Church Photographers Recommended Gear



Indicates great value for smaller budgets.

## TYCKA Rangers 56" Compact Travel Tripod

**\$62** [Amazon](#)

*Quality ball head, converts to monopod.*



## Manfrotto 290 Xtra Aluminum 3-Section Tripod Kit

**\$184** [Amazon](#)

*Trusted quality from top brand.*



## Zomei 58" Travel Tripod

**\$42** [Amazon](#)

*Highly recommended budget travel tripod w/ Arca Swiss clamp.*



## Platypod Max Flat Tripod Base

**\$99** [Amazon](#)

*Innovative solution when using a full tripod isn't feasible.*



# CAMERA STRAPS

Bought a brand new camera? Ditch the stock strap. You look like a tourist and front-facing straps can put a lot of strain on your neck — particularly when you're shooting with a long lens such as the 70-200mm.

One of the best investments that you can make is in a good quality, comfortable camera strap.

## TIPS FOR BUYING

There are a number of different styles of camera strap to choose from, and some manufacturers (such as Peak Design) have created entire strap systems to help you work more comfortably and efficiently.

1. Front-facing straps work fine for smaller (mirrorless) bodies with prime lenses.
2. Photographers who keep their camera in hand may prefer a wrist strap.
3. Photographers who cover events or longer shoots tend to prefer side straps.



Indicates Church Photographers Recommended Gear



Indicates great value for smaller budgets.

## BlackRapid Breathe Strap

\$52 [Amazon](#)

*Comfortable camera strap for holding camera at side. Rob's favorite.*



## Peak Design Slide Camera Strap

\$65 [Amazon](#)

*Popular strap model among church photographers. Interchangeable system.*



## Lance Cord Camera Wrist Strap - Red

\$26 [Amazon](#)

*Handmade, durable wrist strap. Connor's go-to.*



## Frii Designs TriLens

\$169 [Frii Designs](#)

*Carry up to three lenses on your hip. Must have for shooting with one body.*



# LIGHTING

Sometimes you need a little extra light — whether on a portrait/headshot shoot or when covering a special event. Speedlights are an inexpensive, portable solution to get that extra light in a pinch.

It goes without saying, but don't use flashes or strobes in your auditorium. It's super distracting and you'll stick out like a sore thumb.

## TIPS FOR BUYING

You don't necessarily need to go with name brand speedlights, but bargain-bin gear is usually more hassle than it's worth.

1. Borrow or rent a speedlight before committing to a large purchase.
2. You'll *probably* want to use your flash off-camera. Be sure to invest in a system that will allow you to do that. Rob is a die-hard Cactus fan — cross brand, remote speedlights that work on most modern camera models.



Indicates Church Photographers Recommended Gear



Indicates great value for smaller budgets.

## Cactus RF60x Wireless Flash

**\$185** [Amazon](#)

*Cross-brand remote speedlight with TTL and high-speed-sync. Rob's choice.*



## Lume Cube AIR

**\$69** [Amazon](#)

*Portable, versatile LED light for photo or video.*



## Cactus V6II V6 Flash Remote

**\$95** [Amazon](#)

*Wireless trigger for Cactus system. Use any speedlight remotely, and control up to 4 groups of speedlights from your camera.*



## MagMod Professional Flash Kit

**\$189** [Amazon](#)

*Innovative speedlight modifiers — gels, diffusers, grids, and more.*



# CAMERA BAGS

If you're going to invest in your gear, you're going to want to protect it. Good quality camera bags don't just look good — they keep your gear safe.

## TIPS FOR BUYING

You may consider buying multiple bags depending on your day-to-day needs. Quick shoot? Grab a sling bag. Need to carry your entire collection of gear? Pick up a larger backpack.

1. Most camera bags include configurable partitions. Check out the images of the *inside* of the bag to make sure your gear will fit.
2. Don't forget cable management. If your bag doesn't include it, consider picking up a cable pouch and cable ties.
3. Need more protection? Pelican cases are the go-to hard cases of the pros. They're not cheap, but neither is replacing a broken lens or damaged camera body.



Indicates Church Photographers Recommended Gear



Indicates great value for smaller budgets.

## Altura Photo Great Explorer Backpack

**\$69** [Amazon](#)

*Not a top brand, but good quality and huge capacity. Rob's value bag.*



## Peak Design Everyday Sling

**\$99** [Amazon](#)

*Sling style bag. Popular brand among church photographers.*



## Think Tank Photo TurnStyle

**\$89** [Amazon](#)

*Sling style backpack for a grab-and-go kit.*



## Think Tank Streetwalker Pro Backpack

**\$169** [Amazon](#)

*Large capacity bag from a reputable bag manufacturer.*



# Conclusion

At the end of the day, your gear is a *tool* that you can use to accomplish your creative vision. Photographers often get too caught up in the technical aspect of working their gear that they forget about the artistic aspect of their craft.

Putting your gear into perspective will help you avoid that trap.

Remember these principles as you shop for gear.

- 1. Gear alone doesn't make for a great photo.** A seasoned pro can make an incredible image with a budget camera, while a novice may not even be able to capture a usable image with high end gear.
- 2. Your gear doesn't define you.** Life is too short for brand snobbery. Don't be distracted by other photographers who may look down on you. Go make art with the gear you have.

I hope you enjoyed this guide! Thanks again for reading and for trusting ChurchPhotographers.com with your professional development.



Regards,

Rob Laughter

Founder, Church Photographers

