

# “SD, HD, or AK?”

*“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).*

Matthew 5:13-16; John 14:1-9 <sup>1</sup>

Her name was Eunice Farc. She was from Romania, and after the collapse of the Iron Curtain in 1989, she and her husband had come to Louisville to study at Southern Seminary. In her mid-twenties, Eunice was an intense student, focused on returning to her homeland as a Christian psychiatrist. She was at the seminary for theological training and training in pastoral counseling prior to medical studies.

Eunice was in several of my classes over the years, and she was in my office fairly often to ask questions about what she was learning. Not long before her graduation, I was talking with Eunice in my office, and for some reason I asked her what her name was in her native language. When she told me what it was, I had a sudden shock of awareness that, while I had thought that our many conversations had helped me to know Eunice—and there was some truth to that—the deeper truth was that I didn’t even know her real name, the name that was her soul’s name in her heart language.

That realization may have been a bit like the conversation Jesus had with Philip in the Upper Room. Jesus had just told the disciples that He was about to be betrayed, and, while the anguished men tried to take this in, Jesus told them, *“Don’t let your heart be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if not, I would have told you. I am going away to prepare a place for you. If I go away and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you may be also. You know the way to where I am going.”*

*“Lord,” Thomas said, “we don’t know where you’re going. How can we know the way?”*

*Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”*

*“Lord,” said Philip, “show us the Father, and that’s enough for us.”*

*Jesus said to him, “Have I been among you all this time and you do not know me, Philip? The one who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:1-9).*

Listen to that last response once more: ***“Have I been among you all this time and you do not know me, Philip? The one who has seen me has seen the Father.”*** I submit to you that this may be the most amazing sentence in the entire Bible.

As I thought about my conversation with Eunice and Philip’s conversation with Jesus, I found myself wondering whether or not I might be in the same situation as Philip. Might it be that Jesus could say to me, also, *“Have I been with you all this time, David, and yet you still don’t know who I am?”*

To one degree or another, it’s always true that we know Jesus less than we might. Just as I didn’t know Eunice’s Romanian name, and didn’t know her in the context of her home culture, so we’re given only glimpses of who Jesus is in His native culture, the glory of Heaven.

At the same time, not knowing everything is not the same thing as knowing nothing; and nothing is clearer in Scripture than God’s desire for us to know Him insofar as we can while

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<sup>1</sup> A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on May 6, 2018.

tethered to space and time. God has clearly told us that “*You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart*” (Deuteronomy 4:29; Jeremiah 29:13).

That promise appears nine times in the book of Deuteronomy alone,<sup>2</sup> and Jesus would later refer to this as the first and greatest of all God’s commands: “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength*” (Mark 12:30). Further, while it is God’s purpose that you and I know Him more and more fully through all the days of our earthly journey, it’s also God’s purpose that we bring others to know Him as well.

These two things are, in fact, God’s two fundamental purposes on Planet Earth—that we know Him and that we bring others to know Him—and these two purposes mirror the only two things we will take into eternity with us: our own character and other persons whom we’ve helped to bring into God’s Kingdom. Both of these purposes are suggested in the title of this sermon, though that may require some explanation.

The title uses three abbreviations that are widely used in audio-visual circles these days. “SD” is short for “standard definition,” and “HD” is short for “high definition.” “4K” is shorthand for “ultra-high definition.”<sup>3</sup> These terms are sometimes applied to the resolution of TV and computer screens, and sometimes to the quality of audio or video signals. I think the current standard is 4K Ultra-HD, with some screens able to display 8K Ultra-HD.

In order to put this video information in context, when I first got into personal computers in 1987, the state-of-the art form of portable digital storage was a 3½ inch floppy disk. Today’s quadruple-layer Blu-Ray disks can contain as much data as 177,778 floppy disks, a pile that, if stacked one on top of the other, would be as tall as a 115-story building.<sup>4</sup> That’s a pretty incredible amount of information on a disk you can hold in your hand!

If high-definition data is sent to a high-definition computer screen or television screen, the visual result is stunning. High-definition color and resolution combine to create a crisp, clear, and brilliant representation of whatever is on the screen. And that’s exactly what God intends to have happen in and through the lives of those who know Him: that our character would become more and more like God’s character, and that we would be crisp, clear, and brilliant representations of Who God Is.<sup>5</sup>

The question we have to ask ourselves, then, is how well are we doing this, and I’m afraid we’re not doing very well at all. Research studies consistently conclude that the lives of professing Christians in this country are not significantly different from the lives of persons who don’t know Jesus at all. Our values are not very different, our morals are not much better, our marriages are no more lasting . . . and the list goes on and on.

If to be a Christian means to be a “little Christ,” which it does, we Christians are not doing a very good job of providing high definition images of Jesus. We may not even rise to the level of standard definition. The evidence is pretty strong that you and I are not providing crisp, clear, and brilliant representations of Jesus to our world.

Robert Lewis, pastor of the Fellowship Bible Church in Little Rock, lamented that “Without practically-attractive, spiritually-compelling, proof-positive lifestyles, what good are our claims

<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 4:29, 6:5, 10:12, 11:13, 13:3, 26:16, 30:2, 30:6, 30:10.

<sup>3</sup> 4,000 horizontal pixels

<sup>4</sup> 3.3 mm x 177,778 = 587 m = 1,926 ft.; cp. Ping An Finance Center, currently the 4<sup>th</sup> tallest building in the world, at 1,966 ft.

<sup>5</sup> See 2 Corinthians 3:18.

and pronouncements about a life-changing God? If we can't outlive the world at every point—in our marriages, with our children, at work, with money, in our relationships, in the use of our time—why dare to speak of salvation and the abundant life?"<sup>6</sup>

That's all pretty sobering. So, what do we need to do to refocus? What do we need to be like if we're going to be crisp, clear, and brilliant representations of Jesus to our families, friends, neighbors, and coworkers?

Obviously, in order to be like Jesus, the first thing we have to do is to know Him. As Jeremiah recorded, *This is what the LORD says: "The wise person should not boast in his wisdom; the strong should not boast in his strength; the wealthy should not boast in his wealth. But the one who boasts should boast in this: that he understands and knows me—that I am the LORD, showing faithful love, justice, and righteousness on the earth, for I delight in these things"* (Jeremiah 9:23-24). And of course, the more we truly know God, the less inclination we'll have to boast at all.

One of the keys of spiritual discernment is to always pay attention to who is being lifted up. It's impossible for us to, at one and the same time, leave the impression that we ourselves are clever and that Jesus is mighty to save. So boasting is really out.

At the same time, Jesus did say that we are to be "*the light of the world,*" and He did tell us to "*let your **light** shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven*" (Matthew 5:14-16). So we need to think about this.

The Bible is shot through with light, literally from its first chapter to its last. We're told that "*God IS Light, and there is absolutely no darkness in him*" (1 John 1:5).<sup>7</sup> The light in our lives is reflected light, much as the moon's light actually comes from the sun.

In astronomy, "luminosity" is the total amount of energy emitted per unit of time by a star, galaxy, or other astronomical object, and astronomically, luminosity is synonymous with "power."<sup>8</sup> So, to change metaphors a bit, how "luminous" is your life? How much of God's Light is clearly reflected by and through your life? By that measure, would you be SD, HD, or 4K?

The process by which you and I become more like Jesus—more "luminous," more "reflective," "higher definition"—is sometimes called "sanctification" or "spiritual formation." And those processes that facilitate sanctification and spiritual formation are often called "discipleship." So here we are at "second base" in our review of the "five things disciples do every week." (WORSHIP, CONNECT, GROW, SERVE, GO)

Some of you know that NASA is preparing the James Webb Space Telescope to replace the Hubble Space Telescope in 2020. And some of you remember that when the Hubble was first launched, it was discovered that there was a microscopic error in the preparation of its mirror (87 *millionths* of an inch) that initially made the telescope nearly useless.<sup>9</sup>

Happily, it was possible for astronauts from the space shuttle to make adjustments to the mirror to compensate for these flaws. Those changes transformed Hubble "from SD to 4K," and as a result, the Hubble telescope has advanced our knowledge of the universe immeasurably. We

<sup>6</sup> Robert Lewis with Rob Wilkins, *The Church of Irresistible Influence: Bridge-Building Stories to Help Reach Your Community* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), pp. 60-61.

<sup>7</sup> See 1 John 3:2 also.

<sup>8</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luminosity>

<sup>9</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hubble\\_Space\\_Telescope#Flawed\\_mirror](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hubble_Space_Telescope#Flawed_mirror)

might even think about the adjustments made to Hubble's mirror as "spiritual formation" or "discipleship," because those changes made it possible for Hubble to do what it had been created to do.

When you and I begin to consider the "polishing" and "adjustment" needed to move our own lives "from SD to 4K," I'm reminded of Paul's words: "*Brothers and sisters, don't be childish in your thinking, but be infants [SD] in regard to evil and adult [4K] in your thinking*" (1 Corinthians 14:20). And the author of Hebrews wrote that, "*Although by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the basic principles of God's revelation again. You need milk [SD], not solid food [4K].*"

*Now everyone who lives on milk is inexperienced with the message about righteousness, because he is an infant [SD]. But solid food is for the mature—for those whose senses have been trained to distinguish between good and evil" [4K] (Hebrews 5:12-14).<sup>10</sup>*

Let me briefly suggest six characteristics of "high-definition Christian lives." If you were in one of our Lenten study groups, you'll recognize these . . . .

The first characteristic of a High-Definition Christian Life is that it is **PRAYER-FILLED**. Jesus was always in conversation with His Father, sometimes staying awake all night in such conversation (Luke 6:12). And for us, too, knowing God requires spending time with God. This involves investing time in speaking to and listening to God, and we won't know God very much at all without such conversations. The nice thing is that the more we know God, the more we love God, and the more we love someone, the more we want to be with them, so the conversation grows and grows (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Closely related to being Prayer-Filled is the characteristic of being **BIBLE-CENTERED**. Jesus had such knowledge of Scripture, even as a pre-teen, that He astounded the teachers in the Temple (Luke 2:46-47), and He often used Scripture in His teaching (Luke 24:13-27). As Paul would later write, "*All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. . . . It is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do*" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Like eating and breathing, we do it every day.

The third high-definition characteristic is that our lives are **VIRTUOUS**. This quality has to do with moral purity, and Paul told Timothy to "*Be an example to all believers in what you teach, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity. . . . run from evil things, and follow what is right and good*" (1 Timothy 4:12, 6:11). If our lives are Bible-Centered, then we'll be familiar with the many resources God gives us so that virtue can become a more integral part of our character (1 Corinthians 10:13; Ephesians 6:10-20).

The fourth characteristic Jesus wants to focus in our lives is **COMPASSION**. The New Testament speaks frequently of Jesus' compassion (Matthew 9:36, 14:14; Mark 1:41, 6:34; Luke 7:13), and this characteristic has to do with acts of mercy and investment in social justice. John wrote that "*If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion, how can God's love be in that person?*" (1 John 3:17). You and I are among the top 5% of the wealthiest persons on this planet, and God has not blessed us just so that we can be rich. God has placed His resources under our management so that we can have the joy of meeting the physical and spiritual needs of God's children in His Name.

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<sup>10</sup> See also James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981).

The fifth characteristic of high-definition Christian lives is that they're **CONGRUENT**, or **INTEGRATED**. What Jesus was in one place He was in every other place. What Jesus said and did in public was not different from what He said and did in private. Similarly, if our lives are Congruent, then our faith is seamlessly integrated into who we are and into how we live, not segregated into a compartment isolated from our "normal" lives. What we read, what we watch, the jokes we tell, the amusements we pursue . . . every moment of our lives is lived on holy ground.

Finally, when we look at Jesus we see that high-definition Christian lives are **SPIRITUALLY POWERFUL**. As the disciples watched Jesus, *they were filled with awe and said among themselves, "Who is this man, that even the wind and waves obey him?"* (Mark 4:41). After Pentecost, when Peter and John were hauled before the high court for preaching about Jesus, *the members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men who had had no special training. They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus* (Acts 4:13).

And isn't that the point of high-definition Christian lives after all? If you and I are providing crisp, clear, and brilliant representations of Jesus to our world, others will recognize us as persons who have been with Him, and they will want to know Him, too. A focused life is a powerful life, and God intends to pour His power into our world through ordinary folk such as we are, which is a lot more amazing than putting 178,000 floppy disks on one DVD!

So, as you sit here this morning, is your life focused or is it fuzzy? Can others see Jesus in you? Are you a high-definition Christian, or has your life gotten caught up in "the thick of thin things"? Is your life "practically-attractive, spiritually-compelling, and proof-positive" evidence of God's power, or have you got so many irons in the fire that you've put out the fire? Paul said God's purpose is for us who follow Jesus to "*shine like stars in a crooked and perverted generation*" (Philippians 2:15). How's your "star power" doing?

What is Jesus saying to you this morning? Is he asking, "*Have I been with you all this time, and yet you still don't know who I am?*" Whatever your situation, God's invitation to us is always to "Come closer." However things are with you this morning, God's promise is that *if you search for Him with all your heart and soul, you will find Him*. May it be so for each of us, and may it be so . . . today.