As we begin our series, *Becoming a Healthy Disciple: Ten Traits of a Vital Christian*, the first trait is “a Healthy Disciple Experiences God’s Empowering Presence.” A healthy disciple understands the role of the Holy Spirit, and lives daily with a fresh reality of the Spirit’s power and presence. Three *New Testament* authors have a good deal to say about the Spirit, and each of these three voices emphasizes something different. For *John*, the Spirit is the Advocate, the continuing and comforting presence of Jesus with the church, and the source of peace. For *Paul*, the Spirit unites us to Christ, makes us collectively into his body, and gives particular gifts to each person for the sake of the community and God’s work in the world. In *Luke* and *Acts*, the Spirit is the power of God that blows the church into new and unexpected places of ministry, causing the church to cross all kinds of boundaries as the gospel is shared with and received by people from different nations and even by Gentiles.


“Jesus answered him, ‘Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, **and we will come to them and make our home with them**. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me. I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, **will teach you everything**, and **remind you of all that I have said to you**. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, "I am going away, and I am coming to you." If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.’”

In his book, *Becoming a Healthy Disciple*, Steve Macchia highlights five principles that are aspects of *Experiencing God’s Empowering Presence*.

**Principle 1: Exemplify His Fruit — the Fruit of the Spirit**

Earlier in the service we heard *Galatians 5:22-23*, which is about the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is “**love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity (or goodness), faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.**” The fruit of the Spirit relate to the **development of our character**. They are virtues, aspects of love in action that all followers of Jesus are to grow in as the Holy Spirit works in our lives. There’s a sense in which we’re the ground, the soil that the Holy Spirit works on and in to grow the fruit of the Spirit. God will not instantly make us more loving, patient or generous. However, the Lord may put us in contact with people who need love every day. God may allow us to be in situations in which we can
develop patience. We will have opportunities to be generous almost every day. One of our church values is, “We believe in practicing and demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit in all circumstances.” The “all circumstances” part is important because it’s in precisely those circumstances that we find it most difficult to practice them in which we most need to demonstrate they are present in our life. I encourage you to be reflecting about which one, two or three of the fruit of the Spirit does the Lord want you most to work on in this season of your life? Which ones need the most attention? Empowered by the Spirit, all disciples are to develop all the fruit of the Spirit – they reflect a quality of being and our character, and we are to be growing and maturing in the fruit of the Spirit as long as we’re a disciple of Christ.

**Principle 2: Embody His Thumbprint**

Embodying the thumbprint of the Spirit is a matter of our will and a reflection of our heart. When our desire is to embody the Spirit in all aspects of our life then we will be more aware of when we sin and fall short of God’s expectations for us; and we will confess our sin daily to God and not let it grow or fester. As we invite God’s Spirit to reside in our hearts, we can call upon the empowerment of the Spirit to forgive us when we sin, to restore and release us to a deeper relationship with God, and to fulfilling God’s will. One of the ways we do this is by learning to practice patient, active waiting upon God. Psalm 40:1, “I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry.” Isaac Pennington (1617-1680) described this patient waiting: “You must press your spirit to bow daily before God and wait for breathings to you from his Spirit. Pray that he will continue his mercy to you and make his way more and more clear before you every day. Yes, and also pray that he will give you strength in all the trials which may come your way. By his secret working in your spirit, giving you assistance from time to time, you will advance nearer and nearer towards the kingdom.” The late David Midwood, who was a friend of both Steve Macchia and me, would encourage everyone to be watching, listening and noticing God sightings in the midst of our daily and weekly lives. Where have you seen God in this last week?

**Principle 3: Express His Gifts — the Gifts of the Spirit**

Peter Wagner defined a spiritual gift as “a special attribute given by the Holy Spirit to every member of the body of Christ, according to God’s grace, for use within the context of the body.” The gifts of the Spirit are about what we do. Every disciple is empowered by the Spirit with spiritual gifts that are God-given, and they indicate what we do when we serve as Paul states in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of...
tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses."

Paul was writing to a church in Corinth that was divided into several factions with too many individuals who were thinking of themselves rather than the church as a whole. One of his goals in his letter to the Corinthians was to help them understand that although each individual is unique and there are many different spiritual gifts, all the gifts of the Spirit come from one and the same Spirit, and they’re to be used for the common good. For years our church has emphasized the importance of each member serving the Lord, the church and God’s people through the use of our spiritual gifts for the common good.

**Both the fruit of the Spirit and spiritual gifts are important in a balanced spiritual life that glorifies God.** While all of us are to cultivate all the fruit of the Spirit, when it comes to spiritual gifts, we only receive a few, which we’re to develop and use to the best of our ability.

**Principle 4: Envision His Call**

Going back to the beginning and looking at the Bible as a whole, The Holy Spirit or the Spirit of God is the mysterious power or presence of God in nature or with individuals and communities, inspiring or empowering them with qualities they would not otherwise possess. The term ‘spirit’ translates the Hebrew (ruach) and the Greek (pneuma) words denoting ‘wind,’ ‘breath,’ and, by extension, a life-giving element. Envisioning God’s call on our life involves prayer, discernment, talking with and confiding in trusted friends as we try to figure out – what is the Spirit calling me to do? What is God’s vision or call for us at this point in our lives? We each are called to play a part and it includes the fruit of the Spirit and our spiritual gifts.

Envisioning God’s call on our life and making genuine changes often takes time, yet we’re to remember that with the help of the Spirit of God, each of us not only can change, but we also have the power to make a difference in the world and in the lives of others. The Holy Spirit is more about changing and shaping our mind and subsequently our behavior than dramatic, ecstatic experiences.

What can we expect to see happening in our hearts, minds and lives that is evidence of the Spirit’s presence living and acting within us as we respond to the call of God? The Holy Spirit is able to:

- Give us a sense of unity with Jesus
- Lead us into all truth
- Help us worship God
- Guide us in making decisions
- Illuminate our study of the Bible
• Motivate us to action
• Give us the right words as we share our faith with others
• Soften the minds and hearts of those with whom we share our faith

These are works of the Spirit all of us can expect to see in our lives as we respond to God’s call. However, we shouldn’t necessarily expect dramatic or instantaneous results.

**Principle 5: Experience His Presence**

The Holy Spirit gives us the power to live our life as God intends as a follower of Jesus. In order to let the Holy Spirit begin to shape our lives, **we have to ask the Holy Spirit to enter our lives.** In Luke 11:13, Jesus says, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” If you want the Holy Spirit in your life ask God to give you the Spirit. This means giving up our independence and living a life dependent upon the Spirit of God and trusting each day.

When we ask the Spirit to enter our life and we practice the presence of God it leads us to understand deep in our heart and soul that the Spirit of God is with us always – wherever we are, wherever we go, whatever we’re facing. This is what we heard in Psalm 139:1-10 that began our service.

**Conclusion**

The first step toward healthy discipleship is experiencing God’s empowering presence and living each day in the power of the Spirit.

**Here are some steps any of us can take:**

1. **Yield to the work of the Spirit.** If you have never done so, consider taking time in prayer to ask the Holy Spirit to begin working in your life in a new and powerful way. Make no demands, have no expectations. Your only task is to truly surrender yourself to God and open the door for the Spirit to come in and begin changing the way you think and live.

2. **Nurture the growth of the fruit of the Spirit.** Paul says in Galatians 5 that **we are responsible for living by the Spirit and being guided by Spirit.** Set aside 15 minutes to meditate on the list of the fruit of the Spirit (**love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control**). Ask for the Spirit’s guidance to show you which of these virtues needs to be more evident in your life. Ask the Holy Spirit to begin working on your mind and heart in this area.

3. **Use your spiritual gifts in some way to bless God, build up the church, and serve people.** If you have never done so, plan on participating in a spiritual gifts discovery class sometime this year.
4. **Read the Bible with the Holy Spirit.** As you read, pray and ask the Holy Spirit to highlight what you need to hear at that particular moment. When that verse, sentence or phrase is identified, spend 10-15 minutes reflecting on why it may have struck you and what it is God may want you to understand and do as a result.

5. **Listen to and be led by the Advocate when making decisions** (see Romans 8:14 and Galatians 5:25 on being led by the Spirit of God). One of the most important and basic ministries of the Spirit is to provide guidance in our lives. Especially when facing important decisions, we’re wise to ask the Spirit in prayer for direction, leading, wisdom, and insight. We often will discern the Spirit’s leading in an intuitive sense, a word spoken by a friend, or the opening or closing of a door of opportunity. In all decisions we test the Spirit by examining the Scriptures and seeking the counsel of trusted spiritually mature friends to make sure we’re hearing correctly.

In conclusion, remember that overcoming our self-will and yielding to the Spirit is the first and vital step of experiencing God’s empowering presence. Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510) described opening her life to the presence of the Holy Spirit this way, “It is as if I have given the keys of my house to Love with permission to do all that is necessary.”

**Prayer:** Lord, help us to give the keys of our house to your Spirit, letting you have complete control. Give us the trust to invite you into every room. Don’t come as an occasional guest who we are relieved to see depart or to whom we don’t open everything – enter and become the Owner of the whole house. We do not want to turn our eyes from you, O God. There we want them to stay and not move no matter what happens to us, within or without. (Adapted from a piece by Catherine of Genoa.)

**Disciple’s Prayer from Becoming a Healthy Disciple by Steve Macchia**

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. These simple words of praise are my word today, dear Lord. I long to live in your empowering presence, refreshed in the reality of your Spirit, embracing the fruit of the Spirit, and exhibiting the gifts of the Spirit.

I open up myself to the fullness of your Spirit’s power so that I am released to embrace your vision and call. May my daily experience of life be marked with your abiding presence. And may your power reside within me as I trust you today as my empowering Master and King. All for your glory and in the reflection of your Son’s love, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Blessing:** If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

*Galatians 5:25, 2 Corinthians 13:13*