Life in the Spirit Seminar
SEMINAR 1
God’s Love

GOAL
To attract people to the seminar, to dispose them to turn to the Lord, to begin to stir up faith in them.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (Jn 3:16)

The first seminar is the seminar in which we reach out to people and begin to get to know them. It is a seminar of hope, of promise. In it we speak to people in a simple way about what God is offering to them. We share with them about his love for them, the love which makes him reach out to them and offer them a personal relationship with him. Because he loves them, he wants them to be with him. Because he wants them to be with him and to live in a close, personal friendship with him, he is offering them a new life in the Holy Spirit. God loves us so much that he sent his only son into the world to give us new life and he sent his Spirit to dwell within us so that we might be more closely united to him than we are to anyone or anything else.

The first seminar is not meant to be a time for much instruction. It is an introduction, a seminar of encouragement. The presentation is around 45 minutes and it should encourage people to have faith that God will do something significant in the next seven weeks for each of them. The discussion is a time of personal sharing in which we get to know the people better and share with them the things God has done for us. We do not try to accomplish too much in the first seminar: we only try to begin the seminar in such a way that people will want to come back and will want to turn to the Lord. We try to stir up in them a desire for God and a new faith in the Lord.

SEMINAR I
Expanded Outline of the Presentation

Introduction
The team leader introduces himself (if he has not done so before).

The Life in the Spirit Seminars are a means to a better life through Christ:
— they last seven weeks in all
— it is important to attend every session
— each seminar brings out part of the whole picture
— (if someone cannot make a seminar for some unavoidable reason, please tell me ahead of time and we’ll arrange a way for you to make it up)

I. God is not beyond our contact, but someone who loves us and wants to be in a personal relationship with us, and who wants to give us a better life.

A. Our misconceptions of Christianity can be an obstacle to our finding this better life through Christ:
1. Christianity as a restrictive morality (Christianity as rules to keep so we can go to heaven);
2. Christianity only as loving your neighbor (“as long as I live a good life it doesn’t matter what I believe”);
3. God as someone whom we can not contact, who does not do anything that we can experience or know to be his work.

B. The truth is:
— God loves us;
— he wants to make contact with us and have a personal relationship with us;
— he wants to give us a new and better life;
— for this reason, he sent his only Son, Jesus.

C. We can experience a better life as a result of authentic Christianity:
— the knowledge of the power to live the Christian life;
— happiness; peace and joy; better personal relationships; healing;
— genuine community

II. In the Life in the Spirit Seminars, you can take steps which will allow Jesus Christ to establish or restore or deepen a relationship with you.

A. Everyone can experience a change:
1. Those who have not been Christians or have been nominal or fallen-away Christians: during the next seven weeks, Jesus will come into your life in a new way so that you will know that you can find or recover a genuine relationship with him (be baptized in the Spirit and experience spiritual gifts).

2. Those who have been trying to live the Christian life in some way but who have found it difficult or who have not experienced much contact with God: during the next seven weeks, Jesus will give you an experiential contact with him so that you will know that you know him, and he will give you new power to live the Christian life (he will baptize you in the Spirit, let you experience spiritual gifts).

3. For Christians who have already experienced a personal contact with Christ, during the next seven weeks, Jesus will give you a new and fuller relationship with himself (prayer “in the Spirit”, spiritual gifts).

4. For those of you who have already been baptized in the Spirit, the Lord will teach you more during this time about what it means to be baptized in the Spirit and he will lead you into a deeper life in the Spirit.

B. But the Life in the Spirit Seminars are only the beginning:
1. To experience the better life Christ offers, you need to grow to maturity in your relationship with him.
2. In the next three weeks we will help you to understand and take the first steps — in the last two weeks, we will explain to you how to go on
— after that, there are other opportunities and helps which will make it possible for you to grow in what you have begun here.

3. In the next week or so, a greeter from the community (prayer group) will call on you and help you make better contact with the life of the community (prayer group).
— one of the most important ways to learn about Christianity is to see how others live it.

III. You can begin right away to turn to the Lord

A. The Lord will reach out to you, but you must reach out to him.
   “When you call to me and come to me, I will listen to you. When you seek me, you shall find me.” (Jer. 29:12-13)

B. Starting tonight:
   — pray every day to the Lord
   — meditate on his words (explain how to use Finding New Life in the Spirit)
   — if you can, read...

COMMENTS ON THE PRESENTATION

(Introduction) At the beginning we must emphasize the importance of each session of the seminars. We need not fear that we shall discourage people by telling them to attend every week; rather, if we speak to them gently but firmly, we will impress upon them the seriousness and importance of the step they are taking.

(I) The first section is best presented in the form of a brief personal testimony. We want to assure people who have had bad or inadequate experiences with Christianity that they can expect to find something different here; we want to assure them that they can and will have a better life through what Jesus will do for them. One of the best ways to communicate all of this is to tell them how these very things happened in our own lives. This first personal testimony should center mainly on turning to the Lord and the difference the Lord has made in the speaker’s life.

Throughout the seminars, the assumption has been made that most of the people in the seminar will have had some contact with Christianity, but for many of them that contact was negative or inadequate. Most of those who have had a negative contact with Christianity will have experienced either a traditional form of Church life with a strong emphasis on rigid rules and arbitrary practices or a more contemporary, “secularized” Christianity which stressed loving other people, but downplayed or ignored a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Neither form of Christianity gives the kind of life which God wants to offer people. Both forms of Christianity make God seem distant. We must remember, however, that there is also a good deal of authentic Christianity around. When we talk about misconceptions of Christianity or the bad experiences which people may have had, we do not want to give the impression that we think that everyone has misconceptions or has had bad experiences. Our only purpose is to assure those who have been “turned off” to Christianity by past experiences that they will find something different in the Life in the Spirit Seminars.
(II) In the second section, we want to make a simple point: Jesus will do something for us in the seminar. We can expect something to happen to us. He will use the seminar to establish or restore or deepen in us a relationship with himself. But on the other hand, the seminar will be just the beginning of a new life. In order to go on after the seminar, we will need further help.

The purpose of going through the four categories of people is to explain to people in concrete terms what might happen to them. Everyone who has not been baptized in the Spirit can be baptized in the Spirit, but this will mean a different change for different people. For some it will mean coming out of a situation in which their Christianity is nonexistent to a situation in which they can live the life of the Spirit These people will experience the biggest change For some, it will mean the addition of an experiential dimension to their Christian life They will come to know the Lord and see him work in their lives Those people who already know the Lord and know his power can enter into a new “charismatic dimension”, and can experience the Lord in a new and more powerful way Finally, any people in the seminar who have already been baptized in the Spirit will find further help in the instruction and experience of the seminar.

(II.B.3) This section is only to be used by prayer groups or communities that have a “greeter” system See Part III of this manual.

(III) The final section is a short exhortation to turn to the Lord daily In it we share advice on the importance of prayer, meditation, and reading Telling the people in the seminar what they can do to cooperate with the seminar will make it much easier for them to open up to the Lord.

HELPFUL MATERIALS

Some passages which might be used in the talk to support what the speaker is saying: Jn. 3:16, Jn. 1: 12, Jn. 10: 10b, Jn. 14:23, Rev. 3:20, Isa. 45: 18-19, Ezek. 34:15-16, Ps. 145: 18.

Background reading for the speaker Stephen B. Clark’s Baptized in the Spirit and Spiritual Gifts