

# **Life in the Spirit Seminar for Children**

Adapted from the Life in the Spirit Seminar  
by Jerry Munk

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## **Introduction**

The whole of the Christian life can be summed up in one word: grace. Grace is God's undeserved gifts, which He pours into our life each and every day. Through God's grace I came to know Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. Through His grace I was baptized in the Holy Spirit. Through His grace I was introduced to the Work of Christ Community, where I received the teaching, fellowship, and tangible support needed to sustain my Christian life through the years. And, through His grace I met and married a wonderful Christian woman: my wife Jan.

The Lord has continued to pour His grace into our family. When our children were quite young, many parents in our community came to the conclusion that our children should share fully in our life together—including the charismatic aspect of that life. We began praying for them to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, and they were. About this time, the community developed a special prayer meeting so the children could experience charismatic worship with their peers. We also made room for the children to exercise their charismatic gifts in the adult gatherings. In addition, the Work of Christ began a summer children's camp. The week contained all of the things you would expect: games, crafts, boats, swimming, and, of course, camp food. It also

featured a lot of activities aimed at spiritual development. But, the most important event at camp was the “Gathering for Christ” where we would pray for the children to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. At camp, the children would be prayed with year after year: not because what happened the previous year did not “stick” but because the children had matured and were ready for more.

The charismatic life is not just about summer camp and prayer meetings; it is mostly about day-to-day life. Families in our community were encouraged to have family prayer—including charismatic prayer—on a regular basis. This, too, was a gift of God’s grace.

Somewhere in all of this, it seemed right to take our own children, one by one, through the Life in the Spirit Seminar. We wanted to be personally involved in our children’s spiritual life and to share with them this material that had been so pivotal in our own lives. For several weeks in a row, Jan and I would sit down with one of our children and work through the outlines with them—making the content understandable at a child’s level. (I have a strong opinion that it is especially helpful for Dad to be the visible leader in all of this, but I will spare you that lecture.) When it was time for the prayer session, we invited another family for the Lord’s Day meal and afterwards prayed with the child to be baptized in the Holy Spirit.

What a blessing it has been to see our children grow up living a Spirit-filled Christian

life. They were blessed with regular opportunities to exercise their spiritual gifts at both children and adult gatherings. They first attended and then served at summer camp. They participated in regional youth retreats and conferences. They went on mission trips, joined University Christian Outreach, and lived in Christian household. As young adults, they, and many of their peers in the community, have a maturity in the Holy Spirit that comes from many years of living in the Holy Spirit.

This book is my attempt to share this blessing with your family. *“You will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is for you. It is also for your children”* (Acts 2:38&39 ICB).

## **How to Use this Book**

This is a book to read out loud to your children, but you should read it differently than you would a story book—say *The Lord of the Rings* by JRR Tolkien. The difference is that *The Lord of the Rings* is Tolkien’s story. You start at the beginning, and, to get the whole story, you read straight through to the end. This book, however, is not just my story, it is not just my experience; it is your story and your experience too. Soon, it is to be hoped, it will be your child’s experience. As such, you should not just start at the beginning and read to the end. Instead, read a little and then stop and talk for a bit. If everything works well, you might discover that you spend more time talking than reading.

## **What should you talk about?**

First, you should talk about your experience. You will read, for example, the section on making a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. That is something you have done. This is a wonderful opportunity to tell that part of your story to your child: how you came to this decision in your life, what changed as a result of that decision, and how that decision has formed your life over the years. In another section you will read about being baptized in the Holy Spirit. Again, that is something that happened to you. Your child will be interested in how it happened, what you experienced, and how your Christian life is different because of that event.

Talking with your child about your experiences is not just sharing the history of your life with them—although that is good too. It helps them to see that the Lord can and does work in the lives of real people: people they know well. Seeing this helps children have faith that God will work in their lives too. It also will give them a sense of how the Lord works in people's lives—how an individual can engage the grace of God and grow into Christian maturity over time.

Second, you should talk about your church. This book is written for an ecumenical audience. As such, it says some very general things about topics on which your church tradition has some very specific teaching. The book, for example, mentions baptism. Your church, to be sure, has a worked-out position on baptism: what happens, when it should

happen, how it should happen, and how baptism relates to your child at this point in his or her life. You will want to give your child some supplemental explanation that fills out their understanding from the point of view of your family's church tradition.

Finally, talk about questions. The material in this book, I sincerely hope, will lead to questions. If your child asks a question, stop, and take the time necessary to answer it well. If your child does not ask a question, you might want to ask it instead: "So, Susie, can you remember what is God's plan for your life? What do you think that means for you?" Asking questions helps you determine if your child really understands the material, helps teach the material, and helps you make a pastoral judgment: is my child personally appropriating the material?

### **Is My Child Ready?**

This is an important question, and the answer comes in two parts: is my child ready cognitively, is my child ready spiritually.

The cognitive question centers on the child's ability to understand and apply the material. Some children will be able to understand and apply these concepts as young as nine. Others may need to wait until age 12. Determining factors include obvious things like the child's intelligence, maturity, level of interest, but also less obvious factors like his or her ability to sit still and pay attention. I think it is helpful if the child is able to read at some level. The reason for this is that being

baptized in the Holy Spirit typically makes the Bible come “alive” in the life of the individual. If the child is able to read, this important aspect of the charismatic life can develop in his or her life.

Spiritual readiness centers on the child’s relationship with the Lord: have they made an (age-appropriate) commitment of their life to Jesus Christ: do they understand what this means, have they made an actual decision for Christ (or personally affirmed their baptismal vows), and are they living that decision in a responsible (for a child) way? A parental/pastoral judgment is required.

Some children will be doing well with their Christian commitment. Some, however, may not be doing that well. The first two chapters of this book are evangelistic in nature: they lay out the basic Gospel message and encourage a personal response to Jesus Christ. If your child has not yet come into a living, personal relationship with Jesus Christ, you can go through the first two chapters with him or her and help them make that important connection. If they make it, that is great—keep going through the Seminar. If they are not ready to make a personal commitment to Jesus (they do not understand the concept, they do not want to follow Jesus, or whatever) it would not be appropriate to keep moving ahead with the Seminar. In some cases the solution is just to wait a while. Come back to the evangelistic presentation in six months. Not only will the child be six months older, your initial presentation of the Gospel will have had time to “perk” in their heart and mind. In other

cases, maturity is not so much a factor but some kind of rebellion against God. The dynamics of this situation exceeds the limits of this little book. Please talk to your pastor at church, your community pastoral worker, or your small group to help develop a plan.

### **The Prayer Session**

The prayer session (Chapter 5) is the apex of the seminar. Make it a significant event in the life of your child. There is a note to Mom and Dad just before that section, please read it well in advance so you can make appropriate preparation.

### **After the Prayer Session**

Those of us who have been baptized in the Holy Spirit for some time know that it is not the end of the journey but a step (a big step) along the journey. Chapters 6 & 7 begin to build upon the seminar by encouraging a life filled with prayer, scripture, service, and Christian community. Do take a pastoral concern for your children: help them to appropriate these elements of the Christian life.

# **Should we pray with children to be baptized in the Holy Spirit?**

## **Baptized in the Spirit—What Do We Mean?**

This is a difficult question made even more complicated by the fact that the Sword of the Spirit is an ecumenical community of communities, and different church traditions vary in understandings and practices.

It might be best to start by saying what I do not mean by the term “baptized in the Holy Spirit.”

I am not saying that the Holy Spirit is not present or at work in an individual before they are prayed with to be baptized in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is present and at work in every believer—even those not yet confirmed or chrismated. (“Chrismation” is the term used in the Christian East—both Orthodox and Eastern-Rite Catholic—for the “sacrament” or “mystery” that more or less corresponds to Confirmation in the West.) 1 Corinthians 12:3 says “No one can say that Jesus Christ is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.” If we take this verse at face value, the Holy Spirit brings people to the point of making Jesus the Lord of their life. Therefore the Holy Spirit is at work in some way early on. The Catechism of the Catholic Church makes this point well when it says that baptism “gives them the power to live and act under the prompting of the Holy Spirit through the gifts of the Holy Spirit” (#1266).

Furthermore I am not saying a person receives complete fullness and maturity in the ministry, gifts, and fruit of the Holy Spirit when prayed with for the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Peter is a good example of this. In John 20:22, Jesus breathes on His disciples (including Peter) and says “receive the Holy Spirit.” One can only assume that Peter received the Holy Spirit at that moment. In Acts 2, Peter is there when the Holy Spirit is poured out on the day of Pentecost. But just two chapters later Peter is again present as “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 4:31). Simeon the New Theologian says, “The purpose of the Christian life is to acquire the Holy Spirit.” Growing in the Spirit is never accomplished, but is an ongoing process.

I am not equating baptism in the Holy Spirit with the sacrament of confirmation/chrismation or implying that the sacramental act is in any way deficient. Not all Christian traditions hold confirmation/chrismation as a sacrament, but those that do (to the very best of my knowledge) would not say that the Holy Spirit is absent from a Christian until the sacrament is administered, nor would they say that a Christian who receives the sacrament has experienced, at that point, everything the Holy Spirit wants to do in his or her life.

### **What is in a Name?**

The term “baptized in the Holy Spirit” was, near as I can tell, an orphaned phrase up to the Pentecostal awakening at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (i.e., the phrase did not seem to be commonly used in older writings). It was

adopted by the Pentecostals and later picked up by the Charismatic Renewal. Literally, the term means to be “immersed in the Holy Spirit.” If you ask an informed Pentecostal Christian what the phrase means, you will get one answer: one that reflects Pentecostal theology and thinking. If you ask an informed Catholic charismatic what it means, you will get a decidedly different answer: one that reflects Catholic theology and thinking. This is not all that unusual: many Biblical and theological terms morph a bit as you move from one tradition to another.

Back when I was working in the Orthodox Charismatic Renewal, we avoided the term—mainly to avoid misunderstanding. Instead we used terms like “release of the Spirit” or “greater openness to the Spirit.” While these phrases may be less controversial in some situations, they suffer from not being very “catchy” or Biblical. I am happy to use “baptized in the Spirit,” and I am equally happy to explain what I mean by this phrase as an Orthodox charismatic Christian.

### **So, What Do We Mean?**

When I pray with a Christian to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, I presume that person already has the Holy Spirit at work within them. I also assume that they are not completely experiencing the life, the work, the fruit, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. (I am not experiencing the Holy Spirit completely, and neither are you.) This is not to say that I think everyone is at the same place: people can be at various places along a continuum. All I am

saying is that no one in this life achieves perfection.

Sometimes, what I am praying for is a brand new openness to the Holy Spirit. A person may have been baptized, or baptized and confirmed or chrismated, but have little personal awareness or experience of the Holy Spirit in their life (a not-uncommon state of affairs). In this situation, my prayer would be, that the Holy Spirit (who is already in them) would be released (by them) to work in their life—that the individual will be open to the Holy Spirit’s work and gifts in a new way. The charismatic experience of being baptized in the Spirit is one of coming into a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit (i.e. to experience the person of the Holy Spirit personally), to become open to the gifts of the Holy Spirit operating in one’s life, and to begin worshipping the Lord in a particularly charismatic way: loud praise and worship with room given to exercise the gifts of the Spirit. This, at least, is how I am using the term in this book.

Sometimes, however, I pray with people who have already been “baptized in the Spirit” for an even greater release of and openness to the Holy Spirit. This kind of prayer does not imply that there is anything wrong with the Holy Spirit who is at work within them. The prayer is rather meant for a greater yielding and openness to the work, gifts, grace, and fruit of the Holy Spirit. This would be very much in the sense of Paul’s instruction to Timothy: “Therefore I remind you to stir up the

gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands” (2 Timothy 1:6).

In the case of children, however, we may be praying for a Christian who has not yet been confirmed/chrismated. In an ecumenical setting, it is difficult to say with certainty what adults believe the child has or has not yet received, because we believe different things about the sacrament—or even if this is a sacrament. Still, if a child is able to say that Jesus Christ is the Lord of their life, we know the Holy Spirit is present and active in them. This work may be confirmed and sealed at some later time, but the Holy Spirit is there and already at work.

That the less-than-fully initiated may receive the Holy Spirit can be seen in Acts 10:44 where the Holy Spirit falls upon the Gentile believers who later received baptism. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that the Holy Spirit is received at baptism and from that point on initiates can experience the charismatic gifts: “The Most Holy Trinity gives the baptized sanctifying grace...giving them the power to live and act under the prompting of the Holy Spirit through the gifts of the Holy Spirit” (#1266).

To me, it seems perfectly reasonable to pray with a less-than-fully initiated Christian. We ask that the Holy Spirit would be released in his/her life in a fuller, richer way and that the individual would be open to whatever the Holy Spirit wants to do. What seems unreasonable to me is the idea of withholding this from a child who loves Jesus and has committed his or her life to Him. Again, the

Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks to this point: “preparation for confirmation should aim at leading the Christian toward...a more lively familiarity with the Holy Spirit—his actions, his gifts, and his biddings” (#1309). [Of course for Christians in the Eastern Churches—both Orthodox and Catholic—our children are chrismated as infants, so the logic is a little different.] It seems to me, that being prayed with to be baptized in the Holy Spirit (for the release of the Holy Spirit, and/or for greater openness to the work of the Holy Spirit—you pick the phrase) is appropriate both before and after confirmation.

### **The Special Situation with Children**

In my community, The Work of Christ, we pray with children to become more and more open to the work of the Holy Spirit in their life. Because children are gaining both ability and maturity year by year, we tend to pray with them with some regularity. One year we may pray that the Spirit will give them a gift of boldness; the next year, the gift of tongues; and the year after that, discernment. While some may say that the child receives “more of the Holy Spirit,” I think it would be more accurate to say that the child becomes more and more yielded to the work of the Holy Spirit. Of course praying for people with some regularity should not be limited to children. Adults too, can be prayed with in the same way, but usually not as often because they are not changing as rapidly as the children.

Because our children have been prayed with for a charismatic outpouring of the Spirit

(yet another term) they are able to participate fully in the worship of the community. Many of our children speak and sing in tongues, offer prophecy, and receive scripture passages for the body (less regularly at adult-oriented gatherings, more regularly at children-oriented gatherings). They also pray out loud and in a similar way as their charismatic parents. I think this is very good for the children, and it is very good for the community. It seems to me unreasonable to expect children to participate charismatically in a charismatic prayer meeting if they have not been baptized in the Holy Spirit. Therefore, if we want our children to engage in the life of the community fully, we should pray with them to be baptized in the Holy Spirit.

### **A Caution?**

The main caution I have about our practice is, that parents and children might relate to being prayed over as a “mission accomplished.” People, adults and children alike, actually need to walk in the Holy Spirit. It is important for children to have regular opportunities to worship God charismatically and to exercise the gifts of the Spirit. One reason for our children’s gatherings is that it gives our children a prayer meeting where the adults are not going to “carry” them. They have to seek the Lord themselves and be open to his work.

Sometimes young people in high school and college will say: “I don’t need to be prayed with to be open to the Holy Spirit—that happened back in 5<sup>th</sup> grade at summer camp.”

The question is not what happened in the past, it is what is happening in your life today!

## **Some Final Notes**

### **Bible Translations**

Because this book is aimed at children, I wanted to use Bible passages that are understandable to children. I have used three translations to accomplish this goal: the *New International Children's Bible*®, the *Good News Bible, Today's English Version*®, and the *New King James Version*®. In addition, I have taken the liberty of writing a paraphrase of several passages. Feel free to keep a translation you trust handy. It never hurts to look up a passage in your own Bible—just to be sure.

### **The Sword of the Spirit**

This book was written for members of the Sword of the Spirit, an international, ecumenical association of charismatic communities. As such, it makes reference to several elements of community life without much explanation. If you are not a member of the Sword of the Spirit some of this jargon may be a little confusing, but now you know from whence it comes.

### **My Debt to the LSS**

I cannot take credit as the author of this book. I just adapted *The Life in the Spirit Seminar* to a younger audience. Steve Clark

was the primary author of the original *Life in the Spirit Seminar* and I very much appreciate his work. I have attempted to follow the LSS outlines relatively closely. My goal is not to teach our children something different from what we all received through the LSS, just to cut the “meat” into child-sized pieces. When I succeed, the credit really belongs to the original author. When I fail, the fault is my own.

### **Dedication**

The Work of Christ Summer Camp as been tremendously instrumental in bringing our three children into a vibrant relationship with the Lord. I am thankful to all of the wonderful brothers and sisters who graciously served Jesus Christ, our community, and our children at camp. Therefore, this book is dedicated to the Work of Christ Camp staff and especially to our camp directors over the past 25 years: Jim deSpelder, Paul Carr, Bob Ceru, and John and Marcia DeWitt. You have been the hands and the face of Jesus Christ to our family.