



## SESSION ONE

# Discovering a Balanced Vision of Christian Faith and Practice

### THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

*For the leader:* After the group has gathered and is ready to begin, ask them to spend a few moments (allow two to five minutes) in silent prayer. When you sense that the time is right, begin the session with Exercise 1.

### THE FOOTPRINTS OF GOD

#### Exercise 1

*Jesus Christ functions in four main ways in the Christian's life: Savior, Teacher, Lord, and Friend. In our relationship with him, each of us experiences some of these roles more powerfully than others. Which role have you experienced the most and do you understand the best? In which would you like to see yourself grow stronger?*

*Jesus Christ as my Savior: he forgives my sins and sets me free.*

*Jesus Christ as my Teacher: he teaches me wisdom and guides me into truth.*

*Jesus Christ as my Lord: he lives at the center of my life.*

*Jesus Christ as my Friend: he understands and comforts me.*

*Beginning with the leader, answer these questions.*

*Allow each member a few minutes to respond.*

### UNDERSTANDING A BALANCED CHRISTIAN LIFE

The previous question reveals two things about us. First, we are often quite familiar with one way God works in our lives. Second, we are often equally unfamiliar with other ways God works in our lives. This should not discourage us. We should be thankful that God has moved in our lives in profound ways. But it should encourage us to build on our strengths as we stretch and grow in other, less familiar, areas.

*The leader reads this entire section.*

The study you are now beginning will help you identify certain strong, familiar areas in your spiritual life and other weaker, less familiar ones. We all have tendencies, habits, and "comfort zones" where we feel secure and content. When we leave these comfort zones, we may feel anxious and unsettled. Those feelings keep many of us from growing. Authentic spiritual growth requires that we venture out of our comfort zones and experience God in new and exciting ways.

## RECOGNIZING OUR STRENGTHS

### Exercise 2

*Ask everyone to answer this question.*

*In which of the following areas do you feel most at ease—that is, which are your comfort zones?*

*I love to be at work.*

*I feel comfortable with a group of close friends.*

*I enjoy playing sports.*

*I cherish being at home in my garden or reading.*

*I like to be with large groups of people.*

## A PROGRAM FLOWING OUT OF THE LIFE OF JESUS

*Have a member of the group read this section.*

The RENOVARÉ Spiritual Formation program is based on the life of Jesus Christ. As we look at his life (in Sessions 2 through 7), we will see that he had a full and complete life with God. When we read the Gospels:

We see Jesus praying, and we listen to his teaching on the life of intimacy with God.

We see Jesus battling with Satan in the wilderness, and we listen to his teaching on the importance of a pure heart.

We see Jesus ministering in great power, and we listen to his teaching on the comfort, wisdom, and strength that come from the Holy Spirit.

We see Jesus helping the sick and the needy, and we listen to his teaching on the importance of caring for our neighbor.

We see Jesus proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of heaven, and we listen to him reading from the Scriptures.

We see Jesus integrating sacred and secular while observing the ceremonies of his faith.

From the life of Jesus Christ there emerge six distinct areas:

Devotion to God

Virtue in thought, word, and action

Empowerment by the Spirit

Compassion toward all people

Proclamation of the good news of the gospel

Harmony between faith and work

RENOVARÉ Spiritual Formation Groups are rooted in these six areas. The goal is to gain an understanding of these aspects of Jesus' life and incorporate them into our lives daily. By doing so, we will grow more and more Christlike.

### Exercise 3

Which areas of Jesus' life are you most familiar with?

- Praying
- Striving against sin
- Ministering and healing in the power of the Spirit
- Showing compassion
- Proclaiming the good news and reading the Scriptures
- Uniting the physical and spiritual

### SIX MOVEMENTS IN THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

The history of the Church has been marked by *movements*, a word used to describe how God's Spirit has moved upon individuals and groups of people with a particular mission. Usually such a movement has emphasized one of the six areas mentioned above—often called the *Six Traditions*—bringing a focused renewal to the Church. When one effort has waned, a new movement stressing another area has emerged. The following examples illustrate one movement in each Tradition:

In the fourth century men and women fled city life to found cloisters and monasteries where they emphasized the importance of solitude, meditation, and prayer. Antony of Egypt was an early leader of these "Desert Mothers and Fathers." The Church was strengthened by their emphasis upon intimacy with God, and a *contemplative movement* was born.

In the early eighteenth century John Wesley and his friends formed a group nicknamed the "Holy Club" and began focusing on moral laxity and the need for Christians to overcome sinful habits. They developed a "method," and the Church once again took sin seriously. The purifying effects of the Methodist effort were dramatic, and it became a *holiness movement*.

In the seventeenth century the Church witnessed a new outbreak of the Holy Spirit in the lives of men and women who were called "Quakers," led by the ministry of George Fox. The active presence of the Spirit in

The leader asks each person to answer this question.

Choose a member to read this section.



the lives of believers became the empowering principle behind scores of conversions. The active role of the Spirit was at the center of their worship, and it propelled them into evangelism, missions, and social concern. This is an example of a *charismatic movement*.



In the late twelfth century Francis of Assisi and a group of followers abandoned their former lives and went about the Italian countryside, caring for the sick, the poor, and the lame. Countless men and women followed Francis's lead, forming the Franciscan and Poor Clare orders. Their impact on disease and poverty was remarkable, and they became an example of a *social justice movement*.



In the sixteenth century Martin Luther and others proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ after discovering its message anew in the Bible. This message of hope and victory was expressed by clergy and laity in sermons, mission efforts, and personal witnessing. In the history of the Church it is a wonderful example of an *evangelical movement*.



In the eighteenth century Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf allowed remnants of the persecuted Moravian Church (*Unitas Fratrum*) to build the village of Herrnhut on his estate. Initially divided, the group became unified when they experienced a powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit after Zinzendorf led them in daily Bible studies and in formulating the "Brotherly Agreement." The Moravians joyfully served God—praying, evangelizing, and helping others—in the midst of baking, teaching, weaving, and raising families. This is an example of an *incarnational movement*.

There have been other similar movements, both before and after the examples mentioned above, but certainly these stand out as efforts that have had particularly dramatic effects upon the life and history of the Church.

## MOVEMENTS AND THE LIFE OF CHRIST

### Exercise 4

Each of the above movements began with an emphasis on one of the aspects of the life of Jesus Christ. Match the aspect of Jesus' life with the corresponding Tradition:

Beginning with the leader, complete this exercise.

- |  |                                |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 1. Compassion toward all people                | A. The holiness movement       |
| 2. Devotion to God                             | B. The charismatic movement    |
| 3. Proclamation of the good news of the gospel | C. The contemplative movement  |
| 4. Empowerment by the Spirit                   | D. The evangelical movement    |
| 5. Harmony between faith and work              | E. The social justice movement |
| 6. Virtue in thought, word, and action         | F. The incarnational movement  |

(Answers:

## GIVEN TO EXTREMES

### Exercise 5

While each of the movements described above (and others like them in the Six Traditions) was rooted in the life of Christ, as “movements” they were sometimes given to extremes. Within each one there were adherents who overemphasized their particular area of strength. That lack of balance is still common in the Church today. We see, for example,

The contemplative who fails to do creative work

The moralist who focuses on sin and neglects compassion

The charismatic who neglects to proclaim the gospel

The social activist who forgets to listen to God

The evangelist who feels no need for the Holy Spirit

The schoolteacher who revels in secret, harmful sins

*Since you have been a Christian, which of these extremes have you seen most?*

The problems that we have been discussing may lead us to avoid a certain area; however, we really do need all of the Six Traditions functioning in our lives. One area without the others—or one that dominates the others—will naturally lead to divisive and harmful extremes.

## IDENTIFYING OUR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

### Exercise 6

Looking over the Six Traditions of the Church—the varied dimensions of the spiritual life—and thinking about movements that represent them, identify the area that you would consider to be your greatest strength. Which comes the most naturally? Which would you consider your weakest?

The dimensions of the spiritual life are much like a wheel. A wheel is formed by placing spokes around a center hub. Each spoke must be equally strong and equally long in order for the wheel to function properly. If any spoke is too short, the wheel may still roll, but it will thump distinctly with the effort, not functioning as it should. We, too, will go “bump, bump” in our spiritual lives if one area is stronger or longer than another.

*Below is a diagram of the Six Traditions, arranged around the spokes of a wheel. Take a few moments and, using a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 being the least proficient and closest to the center of the wheel), estimate where you are in each area on the wheel spokes. Place dots at those points; then connect the dots from spoke to spoke to form a ring around the hub.*

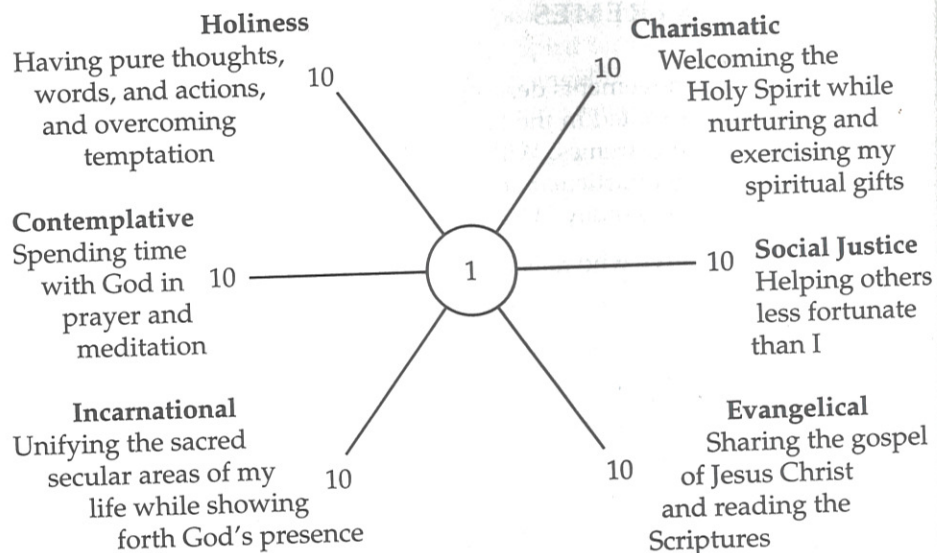
*Ask one of the members to read this section.*

*Beginning with the person who read the material in Exercise 5, answer this question.*

*Once discussion has ended, the leader reads this paragraph.*

*The leader explains the exercise and asks the questions.*

Pause to give everyone a chance to fill out the diagram. Then, beginning with someone who has not begun a discussion, ask all members to share what they feel are their weakest and strongest areas by answering the above questions.



At the end of the discussion, ask these questions.

How many feel that your "wheel" goes bump, bump? What does that bumping make you want to do?

After everyone has had a chance to share, the leader reads this section.

### REJOICE IN WHAT YOU HAVE, WHAT YOU WILL HAVE, AND WHAT OTHERS HAVE

Our discussion reveals that some of us are strong in some areas or Traditions where others are not, and vice versa. This gives us some important insights. First, we have a lot for which we can thank God. God has touched each of our lives in some important ways and has given us unique abilities and talents. We are strong in particular areas so that we can exercise those gifts as a part of our ministry to the Church. We should rejoice in these strengths.

Second, we have a lot of room to grow. But do not be discouraged! It is extremely rare to find a person who is strong in all six areas. The challenge and excitement of this program come when we start becoming strong in areas that we previously saw as impossible. As we look at the above exercise, we should experience hope; growth in these areas is right around the corner for each of us. Let us rejoice in what God will do in the coming weeks.

Third, very seldom do all the members of a group share exactly the same strengths and weaknesses. This is one of the great benefits of being in a group: we build upon each other's strengths. When you hear people say that they are strong in areas in which you are not, be thankful for what God has given them. In addition, thank God that they are in the group with you, for their strengths will help build you up. Rejoice in the strengths God has given each person.

## REFLECTING ON GOD'S PRESENCE

Sometime during the coming week, take a few minutes to write a brief "letter to God." In this letter, try to recall the first time you sensed God's presence and some of the ways God has revealed himself to you since then. Close the letter by giving thanks for all that you know of God now and for all that you would like to know in the future. The letter should be about one page in length, and it will be shared (if you choose) at the beginning of the next week's gathering.

*The leader reads this section.*

## ENDING AND BEGINNING

### Exercise 7

*Passing the Peace: Each member speaks a word of encouragement to other members individually, mentioning gratefully what God has done in their lives. For example, "Bill, I want to encourage you in your ability to help others, and I thank God for what he has done and continues to do in your life."*

*Allow a few minutes for each member of the group to participate in this exercise.*

## A WONDERFUL JOURNEY AWAITS YOU

In the next seven sessions we will delve more deeply into the six areas (or Traditions) that we have been discussing. In each session not only will we learn about these Traditions, but we will also discover some simple ways in which we can begin working their accompanying disciplines into our lives.

Go now with the grace and peace of God. Let us close by joining hands and praying the Lord's Prayer aloud and in unison.

*After the peace has been passed, the leader reads this section.*

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come,  
Thy will be done,  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
And forgive us our trespasses  
As we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
But deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.  
Amen.

*All members join hands in a circle and pray the Lord's Prayer aloud and in unison.*

*Ask for a volunteer to lead the next meeting.*