

INTRODUCTION: THE BREAKTHROUGH PROCESS

Who needs a breakthrough?

If your answer is, “I do,” read on. The aim of this manual is to help you get to God’s breakthrough in your ministry situation by the most direct route possible.

Getting to the breakthrough depends partly on your own motivation to stick with a rather demanding process as we outline it for you. You are likely to be motivated enough if you are:

- facing a new opportunity and struggling to know where to start
- discouraged that in one particular part of your ministry, nothing you have tried so far has worked as expected
- wondering if you are in the wrong place and should look for somewhere else to serve unless you get a breakthrough in a certain aspect of your ministry pretty soon
- mystified and resigned to ineffectiveness but determined to keep on working “faithfully” despite little or no apparent impact

This manual invites you to accept that mysteries and frustrations are a normal part of ministry, especially in cross-cultural settings, and to seek God’s breakthrough in your setting one more time.

How do breakthroughs happen?

Here is the whole manual boiled down to 10 steps and 42 words:

Steps in the Breakthrough Process

1. **Pray constantly.**
2. **Frame your issue.**
3. **Grab for all the help you can get.**
4. **Design your field research strategy.**
5. **Get R.E.A.L. about your plans.**
6. **Use great questions.**
7. **Listen for all you are worth.**
8. **Draw solid conclusions.**
9. **Take inspired action.**
10. **Enjoy watching God’s breakthrough.**

Breakthrough! Steps to Research and Resolve the Mysteries in your Ministry

These ten steps are the titles of the ten chapters in this manual.

The breakthrough process, in summary, is a *field research process* integrated with prayer. To solve the mysteries in your ministry, you may need to undertake a research project using the process described in this manual. The manual is designed to serve you whether you are using it on your own, with training in a “Breakthrough” workshop, with a personal research coach via email, or with supervision in a formal academic setting. Later, we will explain these options in more detail as you consider how large a research project your situation may require. For now, let us look at the breakthrough process as a whole from a slightly different perspective, shown in the following diagram.

The diagram looks simple but the breakthrough process outlined in this manual is not quick, simple or certain to get you the breakthrough you need. The process is, however, guaranteed to make you better at listening to God and better at listening to the people in your situation. Improvement in those two areas has led many other people to breakthrough insights that opened the way to actual breakthroughs in ministry.

Note that in the diagram the “prayer rug” (Step 1) runs all the way up the steps. It has to. The key to the breakthrough for you and/or your ministry team will be the “inspired actions” that you take (Step 9) based on the conclusions that you drew (Step 8) from the information you gathered (Step 7). Without prayer throughout Steps 1-8, you will never get into position for any inspired actions and you will not get your breakthrough.



Making basic decisions about your project

Note: If you already know the size of your research project or which study track you are on (independent study, workshop, email coaching, academic institution), skip this whole section and resume reading at “From the Heart” on p. 6.

At this point, you may have no idea where to begin or how much research you will need to do to obtain your breakthrough. We'll begin by:

1. considering your particular situation
2. considering the various levels at which the manual may be used
3. deciding on the optimal size for your project.

Your situation – Are there any shortcuts?

The good news is that you may not need to use the whole manual to reach your breakthrough. How much you use may depend on factors like these:

- the quality of your prayer life
- how much background and skill you have in field research
- how good your own problem-solving skills are
- how complicated your situation is
- how much time and money you can put into a project right now
- how the Lord usually guides you

If you already are experienced in using the breakthrough steps in the diagram, you may not need to use this book at all. Even with no previous background in research methodology, you may be able to take one of the following shortcuts to your breakthrough:

- A few informal questions to peers or other good advisers may clear up your problem for you.
- God may guide you straight to your breakthrough by prayer and direct inspiration.
- You may want to flip straight to one or two sections of the book that will help you strengthen a particular skill, and that will be all you need.
- You may want to use the miniature version of the course outlined in Appendix D.
- You may get someone else to do the research with you or for you in one of the following ways:

Look up your issue with help from a librarian. Most non-librarians do not realize that most librarians are tired of answering questions like, “Where is the men’s room?” or, “Do you have any books on Islam?” Librarians tend to be very helpful people who love questions they can dig into like, “Our church is considering a new project to strengthen marriages among our members. This is getting to be a crisis for us. It is much worse than it was ten or twenty years ago. What has been written recently about marriage breakdowns in cities like ours? Are there any books or articles that relate biblical marriage values to our traditional way of looking at marriage?” If you write up your question this way and send it or phone it to a librarian, saying you will visit on a certain day in order to see what they have found (or to get their instruction on where to look), you may make a librarian’s day. The person will feel a real sense of satisfaction in serving you. (Of course, some librarians are already overworked, but many will still find time to do things they really enjoy, like answering this sort of question to meet a real need in the real world.)

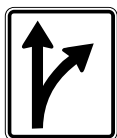
Assign it to someone on your staff. If you are an executive or manager, you are already “doing research” all the time, asking questions to your staff in order to find out what you need to know in order to make decisions and lead. You never will have a lot of time for a full-blown research project of your own but you can use that to your advantage. It forces you to develop others in your organization as field re-

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searchers. Assign one or two of your people to do a simple project about your concern. You may need to help the person/people with the design of the research, coach them on research skills, and/or give them an outline for the report you want, but that is still quicker than doing it all yourself. The second time you assign a project to this person, it will go a lot quicker. (See p. 151 for more details on coaching another researcher.)

Get help from someone outside your organization. Most ministry and mission practitioners do not realize that many seminary and university faculty members are required to do research and writing in order to advance their careers. Capitalize on that situation. For example, if you are a denominational leader and you think the pastors in your denomination are not preaching in effective ways, talk to the person who teaches preaching at the seminary. Instead of scolding that person, ask if he would do a survey of your pastors and write up a research report with recommendations for improvement in the style and substance of sermons. He can publish his research in a journal and both you and your denomination can benefit from it. It costs you nothing except the time to make a friend on the seminary faculty, and if you already have a friend there, it costs you only the time of a contact.

Any of these routes to a breakthrough is easier and quicker than doing a personal field research project as outlined in this manual. Before you plunge into it, be sure you have exhausted all your other options.



Start-up decision: Have you exhausted the easier, quicker options to try for a breakthrough? If not, what further checking should you do before you start working through this manual?

Note: *Throughout the manual, specific “decision” and “action” points are marked with this symbol, indicating a choice of direction you need to make.*

Various levels of use of this manual

This manual is designed to flex for use in “small, medium, and large” breakthrough projects. “Small” means independent study. “Medium” means study with a personal coach. “Large” means you will also do classroom work as a stepping stone to a thesis or dissertation. The workshop method may be combined with the small or medium version. (There is also a “micro” version of process in Appendix D, but note the cautions there before you decide to use that option.)

As you can see, the key difference between the “small” and “medium” versions of the course is using a personal coach. A personal coach is an experienced researcher who walks you through the breakthrough process. This kind of individual attention is highly desirable but can also be rather expensive unless your organization provides it (see p. for details).

Table 1. Small, Medium, and Large Projects

	Time ¹	Methods and sample size	Length of report	Use of this book	Other textbooks (see p. 15 for details)	Other help
Independent study ("Small")	60-80 hrs during 2-4 months	interview and/or focus group 10-20	3-6 pages	Skip the shaded text and appendices	Sogaard recommended	In-house supervisor (in your organization)
Workshop ("Small" or "Medium")	4 or 5-day workshop plus 20-60 hours over 2-6 months	The participant decides whether to use the "small" size above or the "medium" size below in all these columns.				
Personal Coach ("Medium")	100-120 hours during 3-6 months	interview, focus group and survey 20-50	5-10 pages	Skip the shaded text and appendices	Sogaard required; Robson recommended	Supervisor as above plus a personal coach (by email or phone)
Academic Credit ("Large") (Your own course syllabus supersedes these general guidelines.)	120-140 hours during a semester plus the months or years needed to turn it into a related thesis or dissertation ²	interview, focus group and survey 30-100 or more	15-25 pages	Whole book	Sogaard and Robson required (unless alternate texts are assigned by the instructor)	Faculty supervisor; possibly also an in-house supervisor as above

The optimal size for your project

How large a project should you attempt? *The dilemma for most people is that they feel it would take a medium or large research project to solve their problem but they do not have time for even a small one.* For example, a mission worker in Russia "did not have time" to do research on the problem that men were shying away from leadership in the congregation he had planted eight years before. Why was there no time for research? Because his mission had decided it was time for him to plant a second congregation.

Thankfully in this case, the mission organization changed its mind and allowed him to study the situation, but many others have given in to the constant temptation to push ahead with an activity or method before coming to grips with its known shortcomings. While we do not want mission to be bogged down by the "paralysis of analysis," neither do we want it misguided by the "proclivity to activity." Beware of that proclivity (or tendency) as you decide how large a research project you have time for.

As the Chinese proverb says, "You don't shoot birds with a cannon." In other words, it is not worthwhile to launch a two-year investigation into a problem you should be able to solve in two weeks. But neither is it wise to "send a boy to do a

¹ About 15% of this time will be used in actual data gathering.

² If you use this book during a concentrated one-week research methods course, you only design your research during that week, which is about 40-50 hours of the work. The rest happens after the week is over.

man’s job.” It is doubtful you will be able to solve a huge problem with a two-week project.



Start-up decision: How big a project should you plan— small, medium or large?

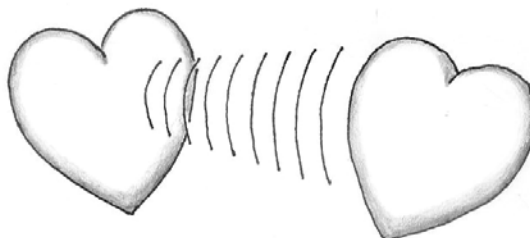
From the Heart

Now that you know whether you are doing a “small,” “medium,” or “large” project, you need to know what to read and what to skip. Appendix C and all sections of this manual shaded in gray like this are only for “large” projects. At the end of each chapter, the extra reading assignments are clearly marked “small,” “medium,” or “large.” For “small” projects, all reading assignments are optional.

No matter what size of project you have chosen, your breakthrough issue is always a matter of the heart. You will choose an issue that is already a matter of the heart for you. During the Breakthrough process you will put your heart into the study of that issue. By the end of it, you will be talking to people passionately and persuasively about one or more breakthrough insights you have discovered.



**“What comes from the mouth is heard by the ears. What comes from the heart is heard by the heart”
—Native American proverb.**



As you know from experience, a lot of classroom education has nothing to do with the heart. The education comes from the instructor’s mouth and goes into the student’s ears. But as you head toward your breakthrough, you speak from the heart, and others will hear with their hearts.

Expect to deepen some existing friendships and make some new friends as you go through the Breakthrough process. Do not assume that solving the mystery that is preventing your breakthrough is simply a matter of the head. You are not Sherlock Holmes. You are a follower of Jesus, intent on loving God with your heart, soul, mind and strength. So use your mind, but get your heart and soul into it as well.

Large Project

Grasping the Big Picture of Graduate Research

Course Description (unless an alternate description is provided by your institution)

“Skills are developed in research methodology through a small field research project related to the student’s proposed thesis. The project provides experience in the design, execution, write-up and application of relatively uncomplicated research studies in the student’s practical context. In the process, students will develop practical, working knowledge of research terms and concepts.”

This module of your graduate program will help you get into position for the major research project you will do for your thesis or dissertation over the next couple of years. During this workshop you will design a Breakthrough project to carry out in the next few months. The project allows you to learn and practice all the skills and steps you will need for your thesis or dissertation. The report resulting from the project may also be used as part of the thesis itself, or it may help you reshape your thesis plan, as will be explained in detail in Appendix C.

Optional Group Activities 1 and 2. See Appendix B, p. 155 and 156.

Exercises

With a coach (“medium” projects). Complete and return the exercises your coach has sent you for this introductory unit. After your coach replies, make improvements as advised. Submit a second draft of the exercises (and further drafts if necessary) until your coach says you are ready to go to the next step. This will all happen within one calendar week for each step unless you and your coach have agreed upon a more relaxed schedule.

For academic credit (“large” projects). Submit work in the forms and at the intervals specified by your instructor (probably less frequently than each step). These may or may not be in the standard Breakthrough exercise format.

A Blessing

No matter how frustrated or confused you may be in your ministry, no matter how long you have been that way, no matter how doubtful you are that this manual will do you any good, may the Lord do you good as only he can. No matter how much or how little of this manual you use, may the Lord flood you with his wisdom, his peace and himself.