

What?! Get up close and personal with God? Is that possible?

Yes! It IS possible. But only because God bridged the distance between Him and us. He is the one who came close to us. So close in fact that he ate, talked and lived among some of us. Jesus is God become man in the flesh. He allowed us to hear and feel God's heartbeat. God does not want to be distant from us! These studies invite you to meet Jesus - to see what he did, to hear what he said and to experience a closer relationship with God through him.



FELLOWSHIP OF EVANGELICAL STUDENTS, MALAYSIA

Working amongst youth of college and university-going age, FES has many years of experience and many stories of young people who have grown and matured in the Lord. This series is just an extension of our ministry to encourage the encounter of God through the Word.

BREAKTHROUGH → SMALL GROUP SERIES

6 in the series for Individuals or Groups

"*BREAKTHROUGH*" based mainly on the Gospel of John, reveals Jesus at his most radical, bringing timely breakthroughs into lives and situations. In each encounter, he seems to scratch where people itch, revealing to them that God does not remain at a distance. Here we meet Jesus making outrageous claims about himself, though they do not seem so outrageous on closer examination. His life when it seemed to come to an end, merely signified a new beginning. He left behind a legacy of new hope and light for us to journey on, unravelling a new way to live!

1. Not From A Distance
2. Scratching Where It Itches
3. I AM 4 U
4. The End Or The Beginning?!
5. Light For The Journey
6. A Whole New World

ISBN 983-2393-00-0

NOT FROM A DISTANCE



— **BREAKTHROUGH** →
SMALL GROUP SERIES



RESOURCES

Not From A Distance

By :



Fellowship of Evangelical Students, Malaysia

6 studies for Individuals or Groups

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The Journey ~ "BREAKTHROUGH"

You must be wondering by now, why this series is called the "Breakthrough series" and what "Breakthrough" is all about. Well, "Breakthrough" is nothing more than our journey with the students in trying to bring the "evangelion" or Good News to our friends.

Challenges Open Doors To "BREAKTHROUGH"

We were stuck!

"What does FRIENDSHIP evangelism look like in real life? After friendships, what next? After sharing the Gospel outline, what next? How does one ease in to share the Gospel with a friend? It seems like nothing is happening!"

These were often heard complaints amongst the students we minister to. It began with the challenge of helping our students evangelise through friendships and making it intentional. What seemed a challenge then, opened doors to this "Breakthrough"! Hearing what our friends in the UK were doing gave us ideas to start our own.

Reaching Out Through Enriching Friendships

We did not want to treat people as targets, but rather persons whom God is interested in. Genuine, enriching friendships is one way we can "build highways" for the Lord to breakthrough into people's lives.

Thus, "Breakthrough" is a holistic endeavor focusing on FRIENDSHIPS, bearing the VOICE of the Gospel wherever God places us, and in sharing the MESSAGE of Jesus (through the gift copies of the Gospel of John). This also means that we are not in a hurry with our friends but are willing vessels in this process.

What Have We Here?

The "Breakthrough series" are Bible study guides intended as companions to the gift of the Gospel of John. Having given the gift, we hope to pray for opportunities for our friends to "investigate" this Jesus.

Our vision and prayer is that the guides become vehicles in order that

- you may behold the Lamb of God!
- you may see and believe!

The TEAM That Journeyed On

Yes, the team has journeyed on. We first mooted the idea in FES (*Fellowship of Evangelical Students*) in late 1999. When we felt that this was the way the Lord was leading us, we started work on getting the copyrights, working out campus strategies, writing the Bible study guides, etc. This has taken us more than one year in "brewing the stew"! We thank God for good partnership with both the UK and Malaysian Bible Societies. More than that, we thank God for each other in the FES team who have worked tirelessly just to see others given the opportunity to encounter the Word of life! The greatest glory and thanks goes to our very God Himself who moved mountains for us and brought in much needed resources.

"Breakthrough" - JOHN'S Gospel

1. Printing the John's Gospels in Malaysia - Mary Vergis
2. Anglicised Contemporary English Version of John - UK Bible Society
3. Malaysian Copyright Holder - Malaysian Bible Society

"Breakthrough" - Bible Study Series

1. Team of Writers - Annette Arulrajah, Audra Darshini, Chan Yoke Yee, Dan Fong Shin, Evelyn Wong, Kong Lee Ang, Loh Kim Cheng, Michael William
2. Layout for Guides - Dan Fong Shin & Evelyn Wong
3. Series Editors - Annette Arulrajah & Loh Kim Cheng
4. Proof Readers - Elisa Dass & Chan Yoke Yee

Bringing "Breakthrough" To The Campuses

1. Paper on Sharing The Idea With Leaders - Loh Kim Cheng
2. Campus Strategies - Annette, Darshini, Fong Shin, Evelyn, Lee Ang, Kim Cheng, Michael
3. Publicity Handbills - Paula Wong & Kevin Thomas (SU)
4. Preparation of Training Modules - Annette, Darshini, Yoke Yee

* All names mentioned above are fulltime FES staff during the period of our production.

Foreword

One never knows what the e-mail may bring - a delightful surprise or more work! A polite message from FES Malaysia was both. "Before you come to Malaysia in August would it be possible for you to pre-edit a series of Bible studies we have written?"

I knew it would take many hours and much effort if it were to be helpful to the writers. But I didn't even pray about it. I knew it was the right thing to do. It has been the passion of my life to encourage young student workers anywhere in the world to make Bible studies the foundation of their evangelistic and discipling ministry.

It's g-r-e-a-t when these young workers can train their students in Bible studies. I think it's even greater when churches ask them for help in this same area. Over the decades from country to country I have seen churches revitalized or planted by graduates who learned to take the Bible seriously when they were students.

Last month I was in Poland for training university students in evangelistic Bible studies. The president of a fast-growing biblical seminary asked if I could do the same course for his theology students. It was a privilege. But what equally delighted me was to discover that we had met some 23 years ago when he was a student. "It was in that inductive Bible study course (at a European leadership conference) where I first learned to study the Bible. I didn't know it could be so exciting. That excitement for God's Word keeps growing. I want our students to know the same excitement so they can pass it on."

At our church this morning I started a new class. I dared to call it "In-depth Gospel Studies", because I think that our church is typical. People sincerely believe Jesus but know him only in bits and pieces. At best they have an album of popular Jesus photos. They need to see the down-to-earth Jesus as in a video, a moving drama. With that title I didn't know if anybody would come. To my surprise they kept coming and coming. What hunger these longtime Christians expressed! One of them, a lawyer, expressed it as "I want to know God more deeply, not just have a good feeling when I'm singing praise songs with others." At the end of the study in Luke 1, Tony asked if he could bring his not-yet-Christian girlfriend next week, because "I think she will dig this kind of study."

That's what the Bible studies in this series are about - scratching people where they're itching. When I did get to Kuala Lumpur last August I sat down with the writers for oral editing. It was a pleasure to work with them. They were highly teachable. And industrious. The sessions were fruitful. After that they re-worked their studies and helped each other in further editing.

Nothing pleases me more than to commend these Bible studies for your individual or group use on campuses, in homes, in workplaces, and in Sunday classes. If Bible studies are authentic (objective yet warmly personal), anybody - - Christian or seeker - - will benefit. For each study takes the biblical text seriously in helping people to see what it really says (not what they have pre-concluded); to think carefully about its meaning and to consider honestly its practical implications.

May this labor of love for our Lord and His church bring fruit, much fruit.

Sincerely in Christ,

*Ada Lum
Honolulu, Hawaii
January, 2001*

Introduction

"God is watching you, from a distance", so goes the chorus of a song. However, the God of the Bible does not just watch us from afar. He once lived among us!

"Not From A Distance" is about Jesus - God become human being. What is God like? We can look at Jesus to know who God is. In his encounters with individuals and groups of people, Jesus was not distant or disinterested. Instead, he demonstrated his concern for them; for their immediate needs or situations and also their future destiny.

That is what our God is like. He wants us to enjoy real life - both now and forever. Life that is lived in close relationship with Him; a father-child relationship.

God has already broken through the distance between Him and us. So don't just stand at a distance. Come up close and meet Jesus yourself!

Using The Guide



Want to immerse yourself in the Word of God?



Want to leave the door open for SERENDIPITY (personal discovery) to take place?



*The Breakthrough Bible study guides are for you then!
Using the inductive approach, the process of O-I-A gives
you the opportunity for such happy encounters.*

O for Observation

To look at the text and pick up the facts (both obvious and hidden), searching for details. Asking questions of the text helps us see more facts.

I for Interpretation

To discover the implications and meanings of the facts, particularly to the original writer or hearers of the Bible. Knowing the background and context will sharpen the interpretation process.

A for Application

To find the meaning for us today, and see how we can put it to practice in our lives. We apply truth and principles that are timeless and universal.

Our format ...

This approach comes alive in our format and the phases we take you through.

Getting Started draws you into the study. Be free to share but do not spend too much time on this.

Come and See gets you to observe the text and see its implications. We have included as much background information you need to see the context and help you to understand the meaning of the passage.

What About You - A Breakthrough? helps towards making the study personal to your life. This is the most important part of the study, so please do not skip it.

ENJOY!

Study One

From Heaven To Earth ~ A Breakthrough!

John 1:1-18

Getting Started

① If you were to migrate to a different continent today, what are the possible adjustments you would have to make?

Moving to another part of the world requires a lot of adjustments. It's like entering a different 'world' altogether. Well, until man finds another planet that is habitable, there is no question of anybody living in (literally) another world. However, there is Someone who has entered and lived in a different world. He came from HEAVEN to live here on EARTH. He is the one who is called 'the Word'.

Come and See

② Who is the Word whom John describes about in verses 1 - 4? What can we know about the Word from this initial description?

③ A common theme in ancient legends and modern-day movies is the battle between good and evil. John identifies Christ as the light and contrasts it with the surrounding darkness (vv. 4-5). What do you think John was trying to highlight using this metaphor?

④ Describe the relationship between the Word and the world that he came into (vv. 10-12). Compare the 2 ways in which the world respond to the Word. What is the consequence of a positive response (vv. 12-13)?

⑤ Let's take another look at v.14a, a crucial point. When we consider that the Word was truly God (v.1), this fact has tremendous implications for us. What are some of these?

⑥ Often, when we talk about glory, it is something that surpasses everything else and makes them pale in comparison. Here, John shares about the glory of the Word who became flesh (vv.14, 16-18). What are some of the resulting descriptions of this glorious One who came from the Father?

Notes

v.1 *The Greeks understood 'Word' as a thought expressed (whether spoken or unspoken). Jesus (the Word) is the human expression of God. The Jews used the term as a way to refer to God.*

Notes (continued)

vv.4,5,9 *Jesus is the true light (v.9) from whom comes spiritual illumination for everyone (v.4). This illumination is likely to refer to the light of conscience and reason.*

vv.6,8,15 *In these verses, 'John' refers to John the Baptist and not the author of this book.*

v.11 *'His own nation' referring to Israel.*

What about you - a breakthrough?

⑦ What does it mean to you personally that God became a human being and came to live in our world?

⑧ The phrase "to become children of God" (v.12) speaks of a special relationship with God. An undeserving person is given that right. Now there is the opportunity to relate to God in a deeper way, like a child to the father. What does this truth make you feel?

⑨ Identify one or two facts from this passage that you would like to think over for the rest of the week. These could be facts you are hearing for the first time, facts which you wonder if they are true, or those which produce a strange feeling in you.

Study Two

We Met Him!

John 1:29 ~ 42

Getting Started

① Sometimes we meet a person whom we will never forget or who became a good friend. What was one such occasion in your life? Who introduced you to this person?

An introduction comes in useful in many situations e.g. finding a job, getting a good bargain, obtaining some crucial help, for ordinary people to meet VIPs, etc. Basically, "doors" are opened and new opportunities become available. Similarly for two followers of John the Baptist, when he introduced Jesus to them, paving the way for them to meet and discover Jesus for themselves.

Come and See

② John the Baptist was the messenger sent by God to tell about the Word (vv.6-7) although he had not known who the Word was (v.31). Why do you think at this point John is so sure Jesus is the one (vv.31-34)?

③ If you were there listening to John's proclamation about Jesus, what would be some thoughts and questions going through your mind? (vv.29-34)

④ Among the first people whom John told about Jesus were two of his own followers. After they heard him, they went with Jesus (vv.36-37) and later accepted his invitation. What do you think influenced their action? What did they want (vv.38-39)?

⑤ The first thing Andrew did after spending the day with Jesus, was to find his brother and bring him to Jesus (vv.40-42)! What do you think happened to Andrew in that time with Jesus? Why the rush to tell Simon Peter?

Notes

v.36 "Lamb of God" would bring to mind the sacrificial lamb in temple sacrifices. Other 'pictures' of lamb would be the Lamb who was led to the slaughter for the sins of God's people (Isaiah 53) and the Passover lamb (Exodus 12).

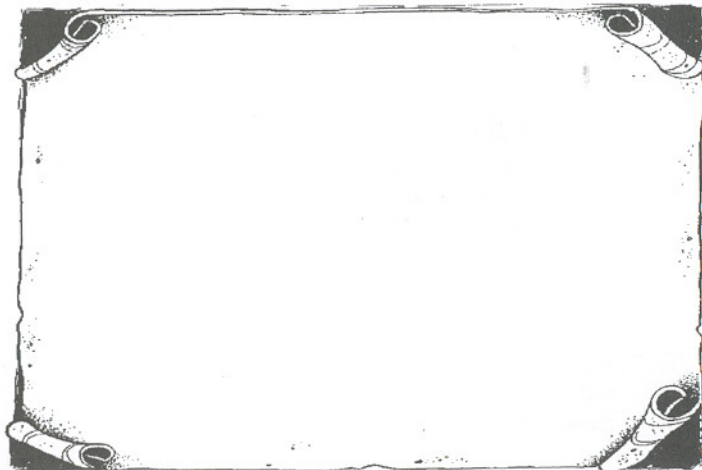
v.41 Messiah (Hebrew) means "the Anointed One". Anointing in Old Testament times is a sign of being set apart for service as king or priest. By the time of the New Testament, there was widespread and eager expectation of "the Anointed One"—a Saviour or Deliverer promised by God.

What about you - a breakthrough?

⑥ There is a difference between hearing about someone and getting to know the person. Andrew's encounter with Jesus left an impact on him, so did Simon Peter's - he got himself a new name (v.42)! What might be some ways one can encounter Jesus today?

⑦ Andrew and the other man's encounter with Jesus took place as a result of John's introduction as well as some initiative of their own. How can this observation help us to clarify our role in telling others about Jesus?

⑧ You have seen three people encounter Jesus - the two men and Simon Peter. Write down your response to what you have seen. It could be to give thanks for people who introduced you to Jesus, to express your desire for a fresh encounter with Jesus, to pray for people whom you want to introduce Jesus to, or others.



Study Three

Entry Requirements

John 3:1 ~ 21

Getting Started

① Exchange stories with each other about your acceptance into a course of study, a club or a job position, etc. What were the entry requirements? How did you feel about those entry requirements?

Have you ever gotten more than you bargained for? Nicodemus probably never thought his night conversation with Jesus would take such a turn. He had approached Jesus with some measure of respect and acknowledged Jesus as a teacher from God. Jesus then steered the conversation into deeper spiritual matters, challenging his whole understanding of what it takes to enter into God's kingdom.

Come and See

② Who was this Nicodemus who came to meet Jesus in the night? From the account of his meeting with Jesus, write up a possible description of this man - his status, religious life, view of Jesus, etc. (vv.1-12).

③ Jesus spoke of a birth which is different from our usual understanding of birth. It is a spiritual birth which can only happen by God's Spirit (vv.5-8). How is the wind an illustration of the way the Spirit works?

④ It is obvious that Jesus expected Nicodemus to know what he was saying about entering God's Kingdom (v.10). However, Nicodemus seemed to be hearing it for the first time (vv. 4,9). What could have been Nicodemus' previous understanding of how a person enters God's kingdom?

⑤ Jesus compares the role of the Son of Man with that of Moses lifting up the bronze snake in the desert (Numbers 21:4-9). In what ways would this help Nicodemus to capture an idea of God's love for the world (vv.13-16)?

⑥ Everyone has a choice whether to put their faith in Jesus or not. This choice is in reality a choice of our destiny or future. According to Jesus, what is the consequence of each choice (vv.16-18)?

Notes

- v.1 *Pharisees were a group of Jews who thought they could best serve God by strictly obeying the laws of the Old Testament as well their own rules, traditions and teachings. They were highly respected in the community.*

Notes (continued)

- v.2 *It can be said to be rather generous of Nicodemus to say this since Jesus had not gone through the official route to be recognized as a teacher.*
- vv.3,5 *God's kingdom - God's rule in the lives of His people and His creation. 'Seeing' and 'getting into' God's kingdom is the equivalent of 'eternal life'.*
- v.13 *Jesus often used the title 'Son of Man' to refer to himself.*
- v.14 *When God punished the people of Israel by sending venomous snakes to bite them, He told Moses to place a metal snake up on a pole. Anyone who was bitten could look at the snake and live (Numbers 21:4-9).*
- v.16 *Jesus is God's only Son.*

What about you - a breakthrough?

⑦ Eternal life is not only about living forever but also about living a fulfilled life. This is the ultimate dream of many people. Some choose to put their faith in Jesus so that they can be given this kind of life. Others try other ways to realize their dream. What do you think are some of these ways?

⑧ God loves you. He loves you so much that in order for you to have eternal life, He sacrificed His only Son. How do you feel about being loved like that?

Study Four

Seeing Is Believing?

John 4:39 ~ 54

Getting Started

① What would make you believe someone who told you a piece of unbelievably good news? (e.g. Tomorrow you will receive two FREE tickets to a world cruise, with shopping allowance thrown in as well!)

“Your son will live,” he said. “Go on home.” That sounded almost too good to be true. When I left home, my son was dying. He is the reason I am here, to beg Jesus to help.

This encounter unfolds in a town called Cana where Jesus had earlier turned water into wine! Jesus was on his way back to his home province of Galilee from Jerusalem. In every place that he went to, he encountered different responses from the people who heard and saw him.

Come and See

② Compare the way the Galileans and the Samaritans respond to Jesus. What are their reasons for doing so (vv.39-45, also 2:23)?

③ Jesus had made this observation - that prophets are honoured everywhere except in their own country (vv.43-44). Later, he told the official, “You (Galileans) won’t have faith unless you see miracles and wonders!” (v.48). On the whole, how do you think Jesus viewed the Galileans’ response to him?

④ Capernaum is 20 miles away from Cana. It would have taken the official a day to travel that distance. Why do you think he chose to come to Jesus for help (vv.46-47)?

⑤ Go through the account of the event (vv.46- 53). How would you describe the official’s faith

(a) when he approached Jesus

(b) when he started for home

(c) when he realized his son was healed the moment Jesus had told him his son will live?

⑥ The father had begged Jesus to come home with him to heal his son. Instead, Jesus told him to go home. Why do you think Jesus chose to heal the boy in that way (vv.50-53)?

Notes

vv.43-44 *Jesus had spent his boyhood in Nazareth, Galilee.*

v.46 *On a previous occasion, Jesus had turned water into wine in Cana (John 2:1-12), after which he stayed a few days in Capernaum.*

v.48 *"You" translated as "you people" in the New International Version, refers to the Galileans as a whole. Both Cana and Capernaum are in Galilee.*

What about you - a breakthrough?

⑦ "You won't have faith unless you see miracles and wonders!" That was Jesus' rebuke to the Galileans. How important is the seeing of miracles and wonders to your faith in Jesus? Why do you believe in him?

⑧ We have seen the official's faith growing through the course of this event. What has your own journey of faith in Jesus been like? Which significant events in your life have deepened your faith? Draw a road representing your journey of faith with milestones (significant events) along the way.

Study Five**More Than Enough!**

John 6:1-15

Getting Started

① What do you do when you are stuck with a HUGE task and you do not have the resources (time, money, expertise/ability) to accomplish it?

If you have experienced such a situation, you would appreciate how Jesus' disciples felt when they heard Jesus' intention to treat several THOUSANDS of people to lunch at a lonely place!

Five thousand people - that's just the number of men, not counting the women and children, turned up at a mountain where Jesus was with his disciples. They had followed Jesus across the Lake of Galilee after witnessing his miracles in healing. With such a crowd of unexpected guests, where were they going to find enough food for them?!

Come and See

② When Jesus saw the large crowd coming, he asked Philip where they could obtain enough food for the crowd. How do you think he was testing Philip by asking this (vv.5-7)?

③ Philip's reply and Andrew's remark (vv.7-9) give us a good idea of what they felt about Jesus' intention. What do you think they thought about

(a) their own ability

(b) Jesus' ability to provide food for the people?

④ What do you think was significant about the way Jesus fed the crowd especially after how Andrew had expressed his opinion about the situation (vv.9-11)?

⑤ Visualize this.

BEFORE: a great crowd of hungry people + five small loaves of bread and two fish.

AFTER: people who had eaten all they wanted + twelve large baskets of leftovers (vv.12-13).

What might have been the thoughts of the disciples who saw the miracle, ate of the food and picked up the leftovers?

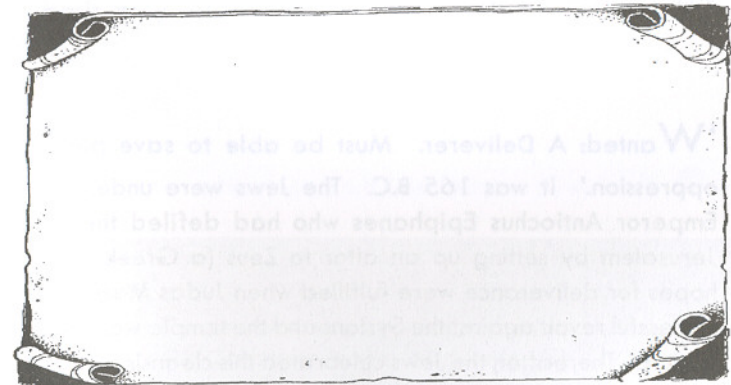
Note:

v.14 *The Jewish people had expected God to send them a prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15,18). Since God had provided food and water for the people in the desert through Moses, the people noticed the similarity.*

What about you - a breakthrough?

⑥ This miracle obviously left an impression on the people. Earlier they had followed Jesus due to his miracles of healing. Now they have begun saying that he must be the Prophet (v.14). What does this miracle speak to you about Jesus?

⑦ Feeding thousands of people was not a problem for Jesus — he more than adequately provided for their need. What is one situation overwhelming you right now? What would you like to say to Jesus regarding it?



⑧ "But what good is that?" Perhaps you have said or thought a similar phrase when you were faced with a great need. Identify one important need in your campus or in society that you are concerned about. What can you contribute as your "five loaves and two fish"?

Study Six

Enough Has Been Said!

John 10:22 ~ 42

Getting Started

① In many parts of the world, people live under some form of oppression; on a national level, in the home, at work, etc. Identify a particular oppression. If you were in their shoes, what would be your most fervent wish?

'Wanted: A Deliverer. Must be able to save people from oppression.' It was 165 B.C. The Jews were under the Syrian Emperor Antiochus Epiphanes who had defiled the temple in Jerusalem by setting up an altar to Zeus (a Greek god). Their hopes for deliverance were fulfilled when Judas Maccabeus led a successful revolt against the Syrians and the temple was rededicated to God. Thereafter, the Jews celebrated this cleansing of the temple annually. It is against the backdrop of this Temple Festival that the Jews (now under Roman rule) demanded that Jesus tell them if he was the Messiah (the expected deliverer foretold in the Old Testament).

Come and See

② Jesus seems very harsh in dealing with the Jews and their uncertainty about his identity (vv.25-27)? What seems to be the reasons he gives?

③ Jesus used the picture of a shepherd and his sheep to describe his relationship with people who put their faith in him. In this relationship, how do his sheep respond to him and what privileges are they given (vv.27-29)?

④ Put yourself in the shoes of the Jews. What is it that would drive you to the extent of wanting to stone Jesus (vv.31-33)?

⑤ Jesus was making a bold claim - he claimed to be one with God. But he did not ask the Jewish leaders to believe without any particular reason. On what basis do you hear Jesus ask the Jewish leaders to believe him (vv.37-38)?

Notes

- | | |
|----------|--|
| vv.26,27 | <i>The shepherd imagery was appropriate since one of the Old Testament images of the Messiah was David, the shepherd king of Israel.</i> |
| v.28 | <i>Eternal life is an infinitely high quality of life that is lived in close relationship with God as a child of God - both now and forever.</i> |
| vv.31,33 | <i>The Levitical law (Leviticus 24:16) prescribed death by stoning as the punishment for blasphemy.</i> |
| vv.34,36 | <i>Jesus was referring to Psalm 82:6, where God called the Israelite rulers and judges 'gods' because they were agents of God's revelation and will.</i> |

What about you - a breakthrough?

⑥ Many of the Jews expected the Messiah to be a military and political deliverer. But Jesus' purpose was to give a different kind of freedom, to give eternal life (v.28). What difficult or oppressive situation is troubling you (or your family or Christian community) from which you need deliverance?

⑦ The Jews had their own ideas about Jesus so much so that they did not believe his claims or the proof shown by his works.

a) After "hearing" some of his words and "seeing" some of the things he did, do you have any preconceptions about Jesus that you need to let go?

b) What new insights about Jesus have you gained?

⑧ The Jewish leaders and the people who came to Jesus at the place where John the Baptist had been baptizing, responded differently to Jesus. What is your response to this Jesus whom you have been discovering and encountering? Write a letter to him, expressing your response.

