



LEADER'S GUIDE FOR ONLINE GROUPS

VINE CHURCH
2020

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SITUATION, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES

Situation

In March of 2020 the World Health Organisation declared the COVID-19 spread to be a pandemic. As a result, and based on the advice given to the Australian Government, a series of measures have been rolled out to help to protect the population and our health system from serious damage. Vine Church has therefore, not been able to meet in person since Sunday 15 March. The following week we made the difficult decision to move all of our Community Groups online. And just like that, our groups and our lives at work, at home, and as part of the church community were drastically changed.

As I write this, the timeframe for these social restrictions is unknown. We have heard estimates of these restrictions being lifted anywhere between July, December and even as far as December 2021. Whatever that ends up being we are in this for the long run. This isn't a sprint but a marathon and so we should be prepared and ready to use this situation to glorify God.

We will feel this distance and inability to meet together, share a meal, offer a reassuring hand on the shoulder, or hug a friend in delight or sadness. However, this season also presents some opportunities for us to see the Gospel go forth and radically change peoples lives. Below I have quickly listed just a few of the challenges we will face in our groups and some of the opportunities we could be praying to see realised in our groups and at Vine church.

Challenges

This is by no means an exhaustive list but might be some of the major ones we need to deal with.

- Isolated and disconnected members
- Misunderstandings and miscommunication
- Serious mental health issues
- Fatigue with online or digital meetings
- Stunted and shallow discussions
- Avoidance of sharing personal issues (easier to hide online)
- Lower levels of accountability
- Easier justification for missing group
- Technical or technological difficulties
- Lack of access to technology
- Distractions of being at home
- Lower level of buy in just joining from home
- Less pattern and predictability in the week
- No body language
- Unclear expectations in online discussions
- Rapid change and unpredictable world week to week
- Unclear patterns and flow of night (getting a tea means leaving totally)
- Leader fatigue
- New skill acquisition for leaders (technical skill as well as interpersonal)

Opportunities

Despite the challenges, there are a number of opportunities that present themselves in this season too.

- Low bar for attendance
- Easy access
- Sense of togetherness as we go through this together
- New appreciation of physically gathering together
- Opportunity to strengthen communities in our groups

- Geographical location less decisive for groups
- No travel time
- More direct opportunities for engage people in online meetings
- Context that makes it socially acceptable to check in with people
- A desire for connection
- People asking big questions about life
- The realisation for us that we don't have as much control over our lives as we thought
- Real and present situations to express our trust in Jesus

You might be able to list more that are specific to your group. Yes, there are challenges but the possibilities are exciting for how we might grow as a community through this season.

Where are we heading?

I'm not sure where we will land once the social restrictions are lifted. But this is what I am praying God will do.

My prayer is that through this season we will grow as a church. I am praying that as we are confronted by the uncertainty of the situation that we will actively put our trust in the Lord Jesus. That we will learn a dependence on him in this time that will clearly mark us out as his followers. I am praying that we will grow more prayerful as we cast our cares on the Lord. I am praying that we will grow in our knowledge of God in this time and seek out the answers to tough questions that we might be able to provide a reason for the hope that we have.

Just imagine coming out of these restrictions with a church full of members who fiercely love Jesus, who actively trust him not with some things but with everything, who really want their friends and family and city to know the life, love and freedom found in Jesus, and who know him deeply and live lives that earnestly desire to see him glorified.

I also am praying that we will grow in number over this time. That through the upheaval and uncertainty that many many more people in our city will put their trust in Jesus. That we as a church, as we broadcast the message of the gospel, will see a whole raft of people saved. That we will go from having 20 community groups to 25 or 30. To grow from 190 people in our groups to 250 or 300.

Please pray with me that we might come out of this season with a church packed church. With so many people who are following Jesus that we need to keep starting new groups, or starting new Sunday services just to be able to fit all the people gathering to praise Jesus. Isn't that a wonderful opportunity. This is my prayer and I hope that it might be yours too.

This Document

The following document is mainly dealing with technical skills for us to be able to run our groups effectively online. But we only want to do that because it serves people. We want to run our groups well online so that we will be growing as a church. This document exists to see our members going deep in their love for God and for each other. We want to develop and grow so that we might see our church grow with more and more and more followers of Jesus. To God be the glory!

SETTING UP THE MEETING

Platforms

God has blessed us with a bunch of platforms that we can use to engage each other in our groups. These are not limited to:

- Zoom
- Google Hangouts/Meet
- Facebook Messenger Video
- Facetime
- Skype

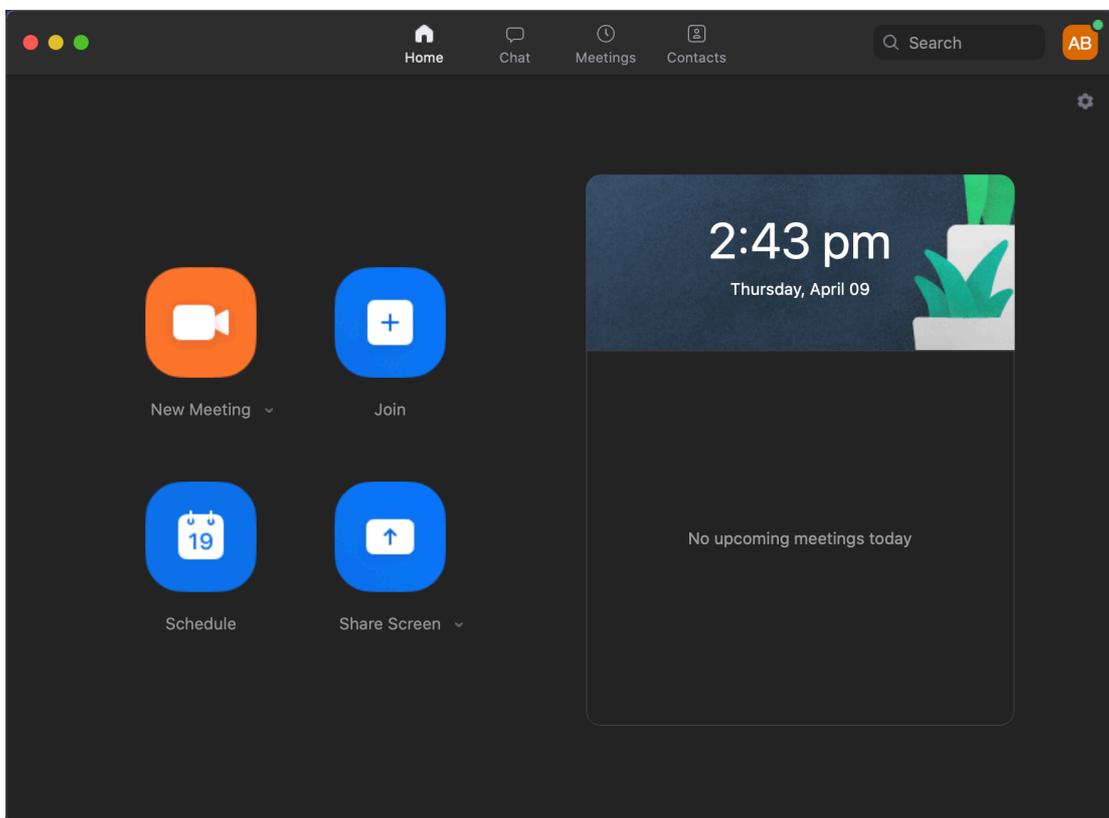
We recommend that you use Zoom as the platform for engaging each other each week. Below we have listed some detailed instructions on how to setup a scheduled Zoom meeting and what settings will be helpful for you to check as you go about setting up those meetings. This will allow some functionality for you to use with your group (breakout rooms, screen sharing etc).

One other thing to note, it is best if you can utilise a computer to run the meetings. A phone is convenient but the functionality and screen size for the computer makes it more possible to engage/see people in your group and to manage the functions you might be using to run the group.

Zoom Meeting (Basic)

Simple and quick new meeting – It is possible to setup your Zoom meeting mere moments before your group is scheduled to commence. To start a new meeting immediately:

1. Open the app on your computer.
2. Log in to your Zoom account.
3. Click the orange 'New Meeting' button



4. Fill out topic, description, when, duration, time zone, and tick 'Recurring meeting'

[My Meetings](#) > Schedule a Meeting

Schedule a Meeting

Topic

Description (Optional)

When 

Duration hr min

Time Zone

Recurring meeting **Every week on Wed, 12 occurrence(s)**

5. Change Recurrence to weekly, set occurs on to the day your group meets, set end date to after 12 occurrences (or any number more than 12 you want to put in there).

Time Zone

Recurring meeting **Every week on Wed, 12 occurrence(s)**

Recurrence

Repeat every week

Occurs on Sun Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat

End date By  **After** occurrences

6. Set password for security and enable video for you and the group. Make sure both is selected in audio.

Registration Required

Meeting Password Require meeting password

Video

Host on off

Participant on off

Audio Telephone Computer Audio Both

Dial from Australia [Edit](#)

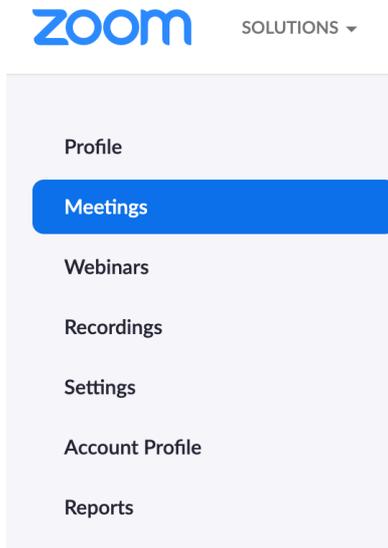
7. Tick 'Enable join before host' in 'Meeting Options'. Assign other leaders in 'Alternative Hosts'. Click blue Save button to finish.

Meeting Options

- Enable join before host
- Mute participants upon entry 
- Enable waiting room
- Only authenticated users can join
- Breakout Room pre-assign
- Record the meeting automatically

Alternative Hosts

8. Your meeting has been scheduled!! You can edit this scheduled meeting by finding it on your upcoming meetings list. Go to 'Meetings' on the menu bar on the left of the website. If your upcoming meetings don't appear then make sure you select the 'Upcoming Meetings' filter at the top of the page.



[Upcoming Meetings](#) [Previous Meetings](#) [Personal Meeting Room](#) [Meeting Templates](#) [Get Training](#)

9. Send out the invites to the group.

10. Add to calendar so you get a weekly reminder.

[My Meetings](#) > [Manage "Darlinghurst Community Group"](#)

[Start this Meeting](#)

Topic Darlinghurst Community Group
Description Darlinghurst group meeting on a Wednesday night led by Andy Bryan

Time Apr 15, 2020 07:30 PM Canberra, Melbourne, Sydney
Every week on Wed, until May 20, 2020, 6 occurrence(s) [Show all occurrences](#)

Add to [Google Calendar](#) [Outlook Calendar \(.ics\)](#) [Yahoo Calendar](#)

Communicating with the Group

Our technology serves people. It is only as good as the relationships it fosters. The benefit of having a scheduled meeting is that the meeting ID and password are the same each week. This makes it easy to manage as a leader and provides stability for the group. You can also invite people by email to join the meeting. This email invite will contain the ID and password each member requires to access the group each week. This is the key point of communication from a technical standpoint. We want to communicate to our groups so people feel comfortable and are able to join each week.

We have a range of people at church and some are more or less tech savvy. One really practical way we can help everyone is by being able to give clear instructions for joining with stable meeting ID and password to use each week. It's also one less thing for you to think about each week when leading your group.

These are the key elements of communication that we think you'll need to get people logging on each week.

- Stable time
- Stable ID & Password
- Group communication platform (for troubleshooting and weekly gee up)
- Text or message to the group before meeting generating excitement to gather

Additional Resources

For a basic video on setting up a meeting, inviting, and joining

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sJq_OM5VcDY

For a detailed video description on hosting a Zoom meeting

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ocTFLh46fgE>

Key Takeaways

1. Technology serves people/relationships
2. Decide and commit to using Zoom for your meetings
3. Set up a recurring meeting for the group
4. Touch base before the meeting to generate momentum for the meeting

SETTING UP THE MEETING

EXERCISE

Checklist for setting up the meeting

Status	Task
	Create Zoom account
	Hit Schedule a meeting
	Set time, description, timezone
	Tick recurring meeting
	Set to weekly recurrence
	Set end date for 3 months at least
	Set Password
	Allow video and audio for everyone
	Allow people to join before host
	Set alternative hosts
	Save meeting
	Add to your calendar
	Send invites to group
	Make sure group has Meeting ID and Password
	Post to your group chat details for meeting

RUNNING THE MEETING

Running a meeting in person and running a meeting online present different challenges. One of the challenges of meeting online is that we don't have the advantage of being able to see the body language of our people as easily. In addition to this it is also more difficult for our members to interact with each other as the technology generally only allows for one person to talk at a time. This makes it more difficult for us to lead the discussion so that it engages everyone and lands for our members. However, there are a few things we can do in the lead up to give us a helping hand in running our online discussions. Below we have listed 6 elements we will need to work on to help our groups to interact in an online format.

Pre-work

Due to the nature of the discussion one way that we can help the group to get some momentum in the discussion is to engage them in reading and thinking before they join. This is a good practice and habit for our people to take on as it will also help when we are able to meet in person again.

How are we going to do this? Each week you will send out to your groups 3 questions for them to consider. The design of these questions is to get people to read the passage closely and to get them thinking about the main theme or topic that the passage drives home. In order for our people to engage we want them to write down some of their thoughts so that they are coming prepared for the study. One of the key rules we were given when I was at high school was to "come prepared for work." I have found this motto/rule very helpful in just about every area of my life. Maybe this was the only thing that I learnt when I was at school (never did it at school but it sunk in).

Give people 2 or 3 days to think about these questions and to read the passage, write some notes, and ask some of their own questions of the passage.

We will generally stick to one of these two formats in terms of the questions we are asking to help people to prepare.

Patterns 1: General topic reflection, question about the text, question about the text.

Pattern 2: Question about the text, question about the passage, question about application.

In general, we will use the first pattern when we want to do a little more work on the text for ourselves. Usually this will happen in our term 2 series where we push ourselves a little deeper. We will use the second pattern when we want to spend more time getting into where this passage makes a difference for my week.

This will be a new pattern for our groups to get into that will help us to get into our discussions online.

Expectations

Following on from the above point we will need to reset some expectations for the group in the new format. Below I have listed the expectations I believe we will need to make clear for our groups to engage deeply online.

- Everyone will write some thoughts on the questions and the passage
- Turn up on time and possibly a bit early to socialise
- Yes, we are all tired of online meetings but this is important for our week and for each other
- Each time we meet is a chance for us to love each other.
- Assume that a question asked in the group is for everyone to answer.
- Expect the leader to ask people specifically to speak
- Each person will share a prayer point
- Show interest in the discussion

- Get drinks, snacks, Bible, setup done before the group starts
- Welcome everyone by name when they join
- Only speak once someone has finished
- Say goodbye at the end of the meeting (don't just log off)
- Speak to each other and not just back to the leader
- We will use our regular communication channel to keep each other updated on our week.

These are a few of the expectations that we have for our group. These go along with the general expectations we have for our groups (bible is word of God, text if you can't make it, opt out not opt in, prioritise in the week, listen and show respect etc).

Take some time to go through these with the group so that everyone is on the same page with these. Differing expectations of our time together can cause conflict. Best practice is to make the expectations clear as soon as possible.

Welcoming

One of the challenges of meeting online is that we forget or don't do a lot of things we would do in normal social situations. Let me give you an example. Let's just imagine that you're having a dinner party at your place. (Do you remember when we were able to do that??) When each guest comes to your door what do you do?

Normally what we would do is go to the door, greet the person, bring them inside, introduce them (or allow them to introduce themselves) and make them feel welcome (possibly offer a drink). Now we don't have a front door to our online meetings for people to knock. Our online meeting is like we are having a dinner party but everyone who comes sneaks in the window.

The challenge we need to meet is to provide that normal welcome to each member as they join. You as the leader will probably have to take responsibility for this. It can be awkward because you might be mid conversation with someone else. But, to make the new comer feel welcome then stop the conversation and say hello, let them say hello to the room (meeting) and then continue with the general conversations that are happening.

Here are the key steps we take to welcome people each time they join our group.

1. Stop your/the conversation and say hello
2. Use their name
3. Give them a chance to say hello to everyone and people to greet them.
4. Ease back into conversation (ask them about their week or give them a summary of where you were up to in the conversation that was going before they joined).

This is a different type of social interaction. It may seem awkward at first. However, if we are clear that one thing we are committed to doing as a group is to greet each person individually when they join the group then people will get used to it.

When it comes to welcoming new members into the group we have given a whole section to that a little further on in the document. This will be a more involved process to help new people to have a good experience when they first join our community.

Timing

Our regular nights we would run for about 2 hours. ½ hour for dinner, 1 hour in the Bible, and ½ hour praying at the end. However, this format doesn't necessarily suit our groups in the online space. I'm not sure anyone wants to hear people chew and swallow their food online at the end of a busy day.

Currently our recommendation is to run our groups in a shorter window. People don't seem to have the capacity or energy to engage in an online meeting in the same way that we do when we turn up to someone's house to dig into the Bible.

Considering this, our groups should run for 1-1.5 hours.

Down on page 31 I have put some sample meeting timelines to give some guidance in this area. We want to have enough time to catch up with each other (briefly), read and wrestle with the word of God, and pray for each other. Having a clear structure for the group and communicating how that will work on the night is important for the group to feel comfortable and to keep moving.

Prayer

As can often be the case we can push prayer time to the end of the meeting and run our group so that we don't have adequate time to share and pray for each other. Rod and Karen Morris, in their excellent book *Leading Better Bible Studies*, break down the time needed to pray depending on group size. If you have a group of 8 and each person has 5 minutes to share and be prayed for then your group will need to set aside 40 minutes for prayer. If you have 10 people and you give them 3 minutes then you will need 30 minutes set aside.

On average I believe that most people will take about 4 minutes to share and be prayed for. Some will take longer than this and some will take less time than this. On average I have found this to be about the average. If you plug that into how many people you have in your group then you will start to get a picture of how long you need to set aside to pray well as a group.

Now, you may have a group that is bigger than 10. What do you do about prayer then? The best option is to split up into smaller groups to share and pray. This could be guys and girls. It could be the group in half. Or it could be into set prayer triplets that remain the same for a whole term or year. We can manage this on Zoom with breakout groups. There is more information on how to manage them below.

Be conscious that sharing and praying takes time and make sure you set aside enough time for the group to do it well. In this time when people are feeling isolated then this becomes an incredibly important time for us as a group as we love and care for each other.

Socials/Fun

As per our normal pattern throughout the year we want to be spending some social time together. Don't forget to schedule these into the year. With so many of our regular social engagements on hold for the foreseeable future we need to think carefully about how we do this as an online community.

Doing something together is a great option and the key will be structure to help the group to engage. At the end of this document I have attached a list of possible online games you might be able to play. There are a lot of options there and so spending some time to pick out what will help your group to engage will be essential. The goal of the social is to build a shared experience which will help people to develop relationships with each other. When picking a game that is the goal we should have in mind.

Key Takeaways

1. Send out the pre work 3 days before group meets
2. Reset expectations for online group
3. Welcome everyone into the meeting personally
4. Give a clear structure for your time
5. Set aside time to share and pray
6. Organise social/fun time for the group

LEADING THE DISCUSSION

This is the heart of what we will be doing as leaders of our groups when we meet together. But our normal patterns and habits won't work exactly the same in the online platform. Below are some things to work on as you lead your group online. This might be one of the most important sections in this document. Taking time to plan and execute this stuff will make a huge difference to your group.

Preparation

As we come to our studies each week then preparation will be key. Like my experience of high school, coming prepared for work is crucial. The online group experience will take some more thinking before the night begins to help people to have a deep and meaningful discussion.

It takes me about 2 hours of preparation (spread out over a week) to get ready to lead my group. I usually split this up into 3 blocks.

1. 45 minutes to work through the passage and understand the main point, how it fits into the book, and what it is challenging me to change in my life. I'll use the leader's notes to help me out here. I'll also work through the pre work questions to help me understand the passage and any other questions that might be raised here.
2. My second block of 45 minutes is thinking about what the main idea is and where we need to go as a group to see that together. I work here on the questions I want to ask and how they fit together. I'll work really hard on how to ask specific application questions that will mean the group gives specific answers.
3. My final 30 minutes are spent just before the group starts. I'll go over my questions and the passage to make sure it makes sense and that I know where the passage is leading us. Here I often adjust questions or reword them to make them more open to spur more discussion in the group.

With my plan from my preparation in front of me I lead the group through the discussion. While I'm doing this, I'll be checking to see if people have already answered something I might ask later. If this is the case then I will drop that question or ask it in a different way to make sure that everyone can see it. When it comes to the application questions I try to use the language that everyone in the group has been using to talk about what their learning. For example, if my question is about obedience but the group has used the language of following Jesus then I'll try to use that to ask my obedience question.

Key step:

- Set aside 2 hours (3 times) throughout the week to prepare the discussion.

Kicking Off

When it comes time to kick off then make it clear to the group that you are starting the discussion time. It can be easy for people to miss things in online meetings. Get the attention of the group and make a start. Give a bit of a picture of the timings for the night (e.g. we will start praying at 8:30 sharp). This is when we want everyone to be engaged.

The studies will normally give you a first steps question to get the group talking. This is a general question that taps into the theme of the passage and helps the group to start thinking about the application/teaching before we get into the passage. Sending this out as pre-work can be helpful so that our members have time to think about their response. I personally love having this stuff early as I suck at thinking of some things on the spot (particularly stories).

The key to this first question is to get people talking. If someone doesn't speak in the first 5 minutes of the group time then it is unlikely they will speak much if at all for the rest of the group time. This question is the chance to hear from everyone.

Following that then go to the pre-work questions. If we expect that everyone has done it then they should feature in your discussion every week.

There is a general trend in our groups for people to despise observation questions or comprehension questions. However, these are crucial for us all to be on the same page as to what we see if happening in the passage. Without this base of understanding that we share from the passage then our application will be more difficult and disjointed as a group.

Sharing from the pre-work questions should take forever but should get you moving as a group. If people have questions that come off the back of these then you will need to judge (based on your preparation) whether these will move you on with the passage or take you away from the central idea.

Once you have worked through the pre-work questions then move into the body of the study. You should have established some pretty clear ideas from the text at this point and have heard from everyone in the group.

Key steps:

- Make a clear and definite start for the discussion
- Give the structure for the night
- Hear from everyone in the first 5 minutes of the groups

General Principles

1. Come prepared

The first and most important principle to run an effective and engaging online meeting is to come prepared. That will mean that you have worked through the passage yourself. You have your questions written and easily accessible for you during the study. You have sent out the pre-work for the group to work through. You know where the study should land and you know how to get there.

Most of the effectiveness of online meetings is the preparation that we put in before the study begins.

Key Idea: Good preparation means a higher likelihood of an engaging group time.

2. 1st 5 minutes matters

If we start our meeting slow then it is hard to recover. We need to work hard in the first 5 minutes of our online time to engage our members. We want that first 5 minutes to be fun, exciting, engaging, and accessible. While you're preparing throughout the week then spend some time thinking about how to make those first 5 minutes' ones that will capture and energise your members.

Key Idea: Make the first 5 minutes memorable for everyone in the group.

3. Be direct in leading

When leading an online discussion we need to recognise that it is difficult to jump in and say something. Here is what some of you might have experienced already in your online groups. You ask a question of the group. There is an awkward silence. Then 3 or 4 people speak at once. They stop and the awkward silence is back. Does this sound familiar?

This happens because we don't have the same visual cues that indicate someone is going to talk when we are online. When we are meeting in a living room then we can read the body language of others in the group and know when someone is going to speak. We as leaders can bring people into the conversation by changing our body positioning or making eye contact. We can't do those things online.

To avoid this awkwardness we should take a more active and direct style to facilitate the discussion. It is alright to ask specific people to answer a question you have asked the group. When you ask a question then follow that up by addressing a particular member of your group. This will help people to know when they should talk and that they will all get a chance to speak at some point. Additionally, this will also keep your members engaged because they don't know when you might call on them to answer.

Key Idea: Directly ask members of your group to answer questions or give their insights.

4. Look at your camera when you're speaking

The temptation when we are leading or engaging with our group online is to look at their picture on the screen. However, we can 'make eye contact' with our group by looking at the camera when we speak. It might seem like a small thing but it will make a difference to how we engage with the rest of the group. When meeting in person it is impossible to make eye contact with everyone at the same time. Online we could do that by looking directly into our camera and addressing the group. This is a more engaging way of communicating.

Key Idea: Look into your camera when you're talking to the group.

5. Less is more

People have a lower tolerance for online screen time. Most of our people are working remotely and they spend a lot of their day on video conference calls. When it comes to group time our people are tired of looking at a screen. Engaging online is more tiring too as you need to concentrate more to be able to pick up the tones of people's voices to understand what they are saying.

This means that we need to run an engaging study. But it also means that our groups will probably only run for 60-90 minutes. As we prepare throughout the week then we need to keep in mind that we only have a short time to work through the Bible. Ask yourself this question as you do your preparation: does this question help the group understand or apply the big idea of the passage? If the answer to that is maybe then leave that question out. A simple and focussed short study is what we are aiming for to keep our people engaged.

Key Idea: keep the study simple, direct, and on topic.

6. Understand your technology

Attention spans online are shorter. There are more distractions and it is easy for our members to disconnect from the study and the group. The fact that I could be playing solitaire while sitting in my group and no one noticing is testament to the distractions that are available to us during online groups. In order to reduce the opportunities to disengage we need to know our technology well. If we are going to share our screen we need to have that image, video, or document loaded up and ready to go. You should practice this with your coleader to get used to the technology.

If you're using breakout rooms then spend some time getting used to assigning people to those. Make sure people have clear instructions and a designated time frame. Below we have included some more instructions and tips to help you to make the breakout rooms engaging and helpful for your members.

Key Idea: Practice with the technology. Have any resources you want to use ready to go.

Hearing from Everyone

Just as a further note to some of the points from above, it can be easy for people to remain silent in the group. We don't have the ability online to use eye contact to engage and invite certain members into the discussion. Here are a few things to make sure that you're hearing from everyone.

1. Give everyone an opportunity to speak in the opening question.
2. Use a direct leadership style by asking specific people to respond.
3. Note who has spoken in your group so you can engage those that haven't spoken.
4. Be sensitive in bringing people into the conversation.
5. Give clear question and space to speak.
6. Get your coleader to help during the discussion.
7. Assess the group discussion after the group is over to see whether everyone spoke in the discussion.

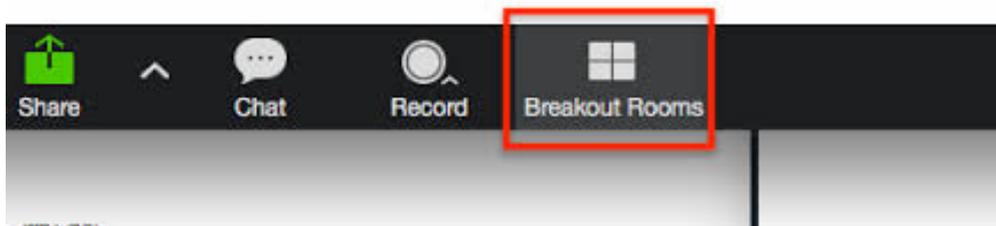
We do have an opportunity online to engage some of our members who might be a little more quiet.

Break Out Rooms

One key tool we can use in Zoom to facilitate healthy discussion is to use Breakout rooms to divide our group into smaller numbers. Below I have listed the steps required for you to send people to breakout rooms and to then bring them back.

To assign and send people to breakout rooms

1. Locate the Breakout rooms button on the bottom menu bar and click it



2. Decide how many rooms you require and whether you will assign manually or automatically

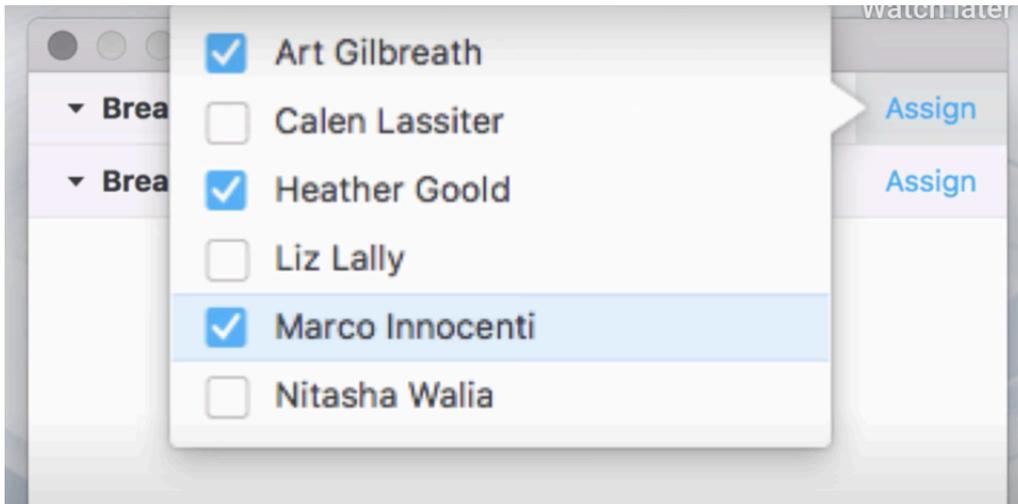
Assign 1 participants into Rooms:

Automatically Manually

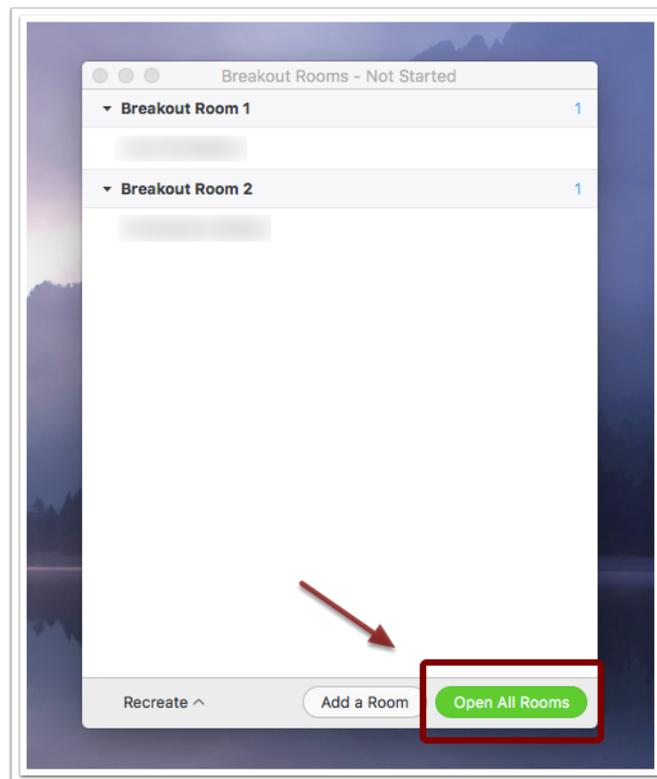
1 participants per room

[Create Rooms](#)

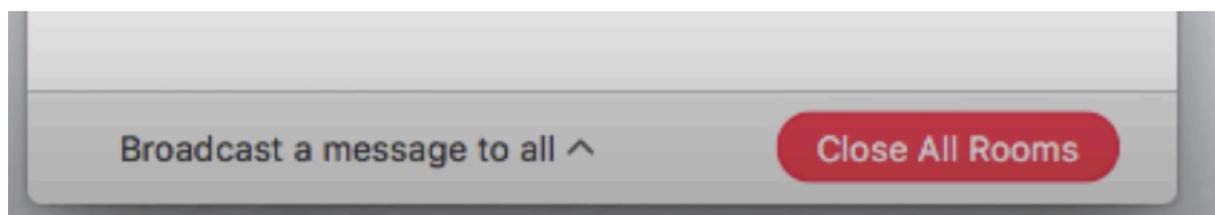
3. Assign people manually by clicking assign and then checking the names of the people for the room.



4. Confirm selections and open all rooms



To call people back to the main meeting from breakout rooms hit 'Close all Rooms'



People will have 60 seconds to finish up their conversation before being brought back to the main group. Next to the 'Close all Rooms' button is a broadcast a message to all button. If you click on this then you can write a message to every room that will be displayed in the middle of the screen for everyone to see. You could use this to warn people that they only have 5 mins left to complete their assigned activity.

Helpful Summary

Here is a video that will help you to get a brief overview of breakout rooms:
<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/206476313-Managing-Breakout-Rooms>

Utilising Breakout rooms

Here are some key things to keep in mind if you're using breakout rooms.

1. Give a specific task for the group to accomplish.

Bruce's experience with these rooms is that the more specific a task that you can give to the group the better the room works. For example, you could give one group the task of looking at a passage and writing down all of the reference to the future that Jesus makes. The next group could track down all the present references. The final group could track down all the past references. Report back the significance of what we learn.

Giving clear specifics is most helpful. This will require preparation before the group starts so that you can give clear instructions on what they are trying to accomplish together and where they can find that information.

2. Get the group to report back to the bigger group

The smaller group will allow people to have more of a voice. The specific task will give clarity to what they are trying to accomplish together. But once they have accomplished that task then they need to report back their learning to the group. Make this clear before the groups breakout to do their specific task. Note down the groups and ask someone specific to report back. Using the directive style will help here.

3. Make sure that each group has something unique to bring to the conversation

Each group needs to be important to further the discussion. This will mean that each group speaks in the big group. What they report back should help the whole group to grasp what the passage is talking about. Each report will move us forward in our understanding of the passage and bring us closer to our application.

4. Your next question needs to move the group forward with the new information

With the information that the groups have brought back the next step is to take that and move forward. It can be demoralizing if people do the work, report back, and it was essentially a pointless exercise. In your preparation know what each group is bringing back and use that to shape the next question. Let me give you an example.

Let's pretend you've broken off into 3 groups to read Ephesians chapter 1. The first group is gathering every action the Father takes. Group 2 is noting every action the Son takes. Group 3 is finding every action that the Spirit takes. They report back and say that the Father plans, the Son sheds his blood, and the Spirit applies Jesus' work to us. The next move to make would be to ask what work do we need to do in our own salvation. Or you could ask the group to describe from this passage how their salvation came about. This is using the reports and information the group have brought and moving the conversation on the passage forward.

Good and Bad Questions

The questions we ask will go a long way to determining whether our discussion is one that flows and engages our people or whether it is stunted and shallow. In general, we want to be asking open questions that allow people move deeper into the text and discover the treasures that lie within. Our questions want to develop movement and momentum in our studies to engage people and to focus them on the text at hand.

I have listed below a few types of questions that we use in our studies and then how we might be able to change their wording to make them more open and engaging.

Question Type	Goal	Bad	Better
Launch/First Steps	Purposeful, interesting, easy, and open question to get the group talking and thinking about the big idea of the passage	What do you think about obedience?	When has following instructions been helpful for you?
Observation	Help group to see content and structure of the passage	What does verse 4 say?	Where does Jesus mention hope in the passage and what does he say about it?
Interpretation	Gathering together what is in the text to make sense of what the writer is communicating	What does this passage mean?	Why is Paul telling the Colossians all these things about Jesus?
Correlation	To help link this passage to the rest of the book and the rest of the Bible	Does this remind you of anywhere else in the Bible?	What do all of the Servant songs (Isa 42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:4-9, 52:13-53:12) that Isaiah writes have in common?
Summary	Draw the ideas discovered together to form a big idea or clear picture of the central truth of the passage.	So, what is all this?	What are the three Key elements that Peter is telling us in this passage? Can you put them into a sentence together?
Application/ Implication	To think through the concrete belief and behaviour steps that the passage has moved us to consider/change.	What does this mean for you?	Why is it important for us to know the truth and hold on to it? What truths do you find hardest to hold on to?

Now, the bad questions are pretty bad, aren't they? They are either too vague or too narrow. Notice how the better questions are both specific and open so that there is lots that can be said about each of them.

We want to craft questions that will open up the discussion and then ask follow up questions to these that will help the group discuss and work on what the passage says, what it means, and then how it challenges or changes how we live or think.

A lot of this goes for studies we are doing in person too but this is even more important when we are running online discussions.

Dangers

When running an online discussion there is several dangers we should be aware of as leaders.

Ping-Pong Discussion

A ping-pong discussion is where the leader asks a question, the group answers back to the leader, the leader asks a question, someone answers back to the leader, on and on and on this goes. It is really just a back and forth between the leader and individual group members. We are in danger of this when we are leading in person but especially online. Why? Because the online platform really only allows for 1 person to speak at a time. We also don't have ability to use eye contact or body language to communicate this is for everyone. This can lead to the unconscious idea that we are just answering the person who asked the question.

How do we avoid falling into this kind of discussion?

- Name to the group that this can be a problem
- Set an expectation that when a question is asked by the leader or another person that anyone in the group can answer.
- Ask open questions that need more than a 1-word or 2-word answer (Open question is like, why do you think re responded that way? Rather than, Is that the right way to respond?).
- Keep pointing people back to the text. (Where did you see that in the text? What in this passage made you say/think that?).
- Acknowledge the persons answer and then ask for more from the group (Really helpful, is there more we could say from this passage? Great! Do others agree? Would you go further than that?).
- Get the group to respond (What do others think about that? Do others see that too?).
- Seek more information (Can you explain that again, I just want to make sure I've got it?).
- Use answer as a launching pad for the group. (So if Benji is say xx then what does that mean for v 23? So Viv is making the point here that xx. If that's true then what does that mean for how I approach church on a Sunday?).
- Still use open and positive body language (nod, mmm, smile, sit forward).
- Utilise breakout rooms with each group looking at something specific.

Silent Majority

This danger is where only a small number of the people in the group actually say anything. It is possible to have only 3 out of 10 people talk in a study. The issue here is that people are then disconnected and disengaged from the study. We want all our members to be involved, engaged and digging deep into the Word of God.

How do we avoid falling into this kind of discussion?

- Ask a good first question (something relevant with more than one answer and that is engaging/controversial is the way to go here).
- Call on people specifically to answer some questions. (this is more acceptable in an online forum).
- Use breakout rooms with smaller numbers.
- Ask relevant and engaging application questions about specific areas of life.
- Identify those who are likely to be silent and ask them to help with an element of the study.
- Keep a tally of the people who have spoken in the discussion beside your computer to keep track of people who might not have had a voice.

What we are trying to foster here is engagement in the group. If we ask good questions and look out for people then I believe that we will be able to run engaging studies that don't have a silent majority.

Class is in Session

Monologue isn't the format we are shooting for in our groups. When I am unprepared for a study then I don't usually have good questions to ask the group. When I don't have good questions then my

tendency is to speak more and explain more. I end up doing all the work in getting to the heart of the passage and this disengages our members. What then happens is that our application of the passage is average and shallow. People haven't grasped hold of the meaning of the passage for themselves and so they find it hard to see the relevance for themselves.

"A truth taught is interesting,
A truth caught is exciting and challenging,
A truth discovered is life changing."

We want our members to be discovering truth as they wrestle with the Bible. When class is in session our studies will only be interesting and not life changing.

How do we avoid falling into this kind of discussion?

- Prepare good questions to lead the group through the discussion.
- Keep asking for more information when people answer questions.
- Throw to the group to get their response to the passage and other comments given by members.
- Ask people where they found something in the text.
- Encourage the group to ask questions of the rest of the group.
- Ask the group to solve something that you yourself don't know the answer to (if it fits with where the study is going).
- Ask your coleader for feedback on how long you talk and the questions you ask.
- Only answer a question in the group if no one is talking and the group is completely stuck (but use this as a launching pad for your next question).

The mode of operation in our groups is discussion and not a seminar. Make every effort to ask good questions and to help the group to discover the truth for themselves.

The Impersonal Touch

This happens when we get to the application and people give general ideas rather than anything specific. It reveals that what they have been learning hasn't impacted them specifically or that they don't yet understand the core truth in such a way that they could act on it. It may also reveal that we haven't moved the discussion in a way that has taken it to a practical outcome.

How do we avoid falling into this kind of discussion?

- Prepare questions that will move people to consider the passage and give them a clear picture of what is being taught.
- Make sure that people know the meaning of the passage before you move on to apply it.
- Ask specific application questions.
- Give a context for the application question (work, home, relationships, friendships, church, small group).
- Follow up the general answer with a specific question (Yeah John we are meant to obey him in everything. In what ways are you challenged in obeying him when you're working onsite? What are the biggest pressures you face when you're at work?).
- Be gently blunt (Yeah so what does that mean for you at work tomorrow?).
- Share of yourself with the group (be open and honest with your own reflections).

Keep in mind that people can also be tired and disheartened in the group. You want to build them up in their time in the group. Some others will hold themselves at a distance and your job then is to nurture and encourage them to go deeper with the community.

Key Takeaways

1. Preparation is crucial for running a clear and helpful study.
2. The first 5 minutes matters even more in an online meeting

3. Hear from everyone in the opening question
4. Be direct in your leadership of the discussion
5. Look at your camera when speaking to make sure you're speaking to the group
6. Do less in the study to make it clearer and to keep people engaged
7. Understand your technology so that you reduce distractions
8. Use breakout rooms to prompt smaller group discussion
9. Prepare and give clear instructions for each breakout group
10. Ask open and not closed questions to the group to prompt discussion
11. Beware of the dangers of online studies and work against them actively with your coleader

WELCOMING AND INTEGRATING NEW PEOPLE

Goal

Integrating new people online presents several challenges. Our desire is for every new person to be welcomed and integrated into our community. We want people to come and join our groups and feel that they have a home and a community. We want them to grow deep personal relationships and receive encouragement, support, care, and challenge from their group.

Why

God is at work in growing his church. While we livestream our services, we are getting a whole bunch of new people looking in on what we are doing. We have already had quite a few new contacts and new people who would like to call Vine Church their home. This is a massive opportunity and our groups play a major role in welcoming new people. It is one thing to join an online service and another to join a group with others where you are seen and known and loved. Our joining a group takes it from being something you watch to something you're involved in. Our groups are where people will experience community and will be integrated into our Vine Church family. But doing this in an online format is more difficult than it normally would be.

Why is it more difficult?

1. When we meet together in person there can be multiple conversations happening at once. In the online world it is like 5 lanes of traffic all merging into 1. Only 1 person can talk at a time which makes getting to know a group of people slow and difficult.
2. We don't get any of the normal physical cues we get in person. It's hard to tell if someone is joking or serious, happy or frustrated, genuine or sarcastic. Online communication is a lot less dynamic than in person communication. This means we need to be very deliberate and considerate in our verbal communication as a group.

Because of these challenges our role as leaders is even more important than it normally is. It is our responsibility to help to integrate new people to that they feel at home in our groups. It is also our responsibility to lead our groups to be places where this happens week in and week out. This can be a significant challenge for us as leaders.

For this reason, we want to have a clear and helpful process for welcoming people into our groups. Below I have given the steps we are adopting to welcome all new people into our online Community Groups.

How

This is the process we will be using for all the new people we are adding to our groups!!

Before their first time

Once you've been given contact details for a new member.

1. Give them a call to invite them along to your group as soon as you can.
2. Let them know the details (day, start time, finish time, Zoom meeting ID and password)
3. Tell them what to expect of the night (pre-work, Bible discussion, breakout rooms, sharing and prayer)
4. Get to know a few things about them (job, church past, interests)
5. Invite them to join the first meeting early to meet another member when there aren't as many people on Zoom
6. Send any pre-work they need to think about before coming.

Once you've made that initial contact

1. Let your group know you will have a new person joining
2. Encourage your group to give them a warm welcome
3. Give the group clear instructions on the welcoming process (when you join the group introduce yourself to the new member, how many years at Vine, ask them a question about their life)
4. Choose one other person from your group to ask to help to welcome the new member
5. Line-up that person to join the meeting 10 minutes early to greet the new member

When they Join

On the night they join

1. Join the meeting 15 minutes early to make sure you're ready to greet the new member
2. When they join say hello and ask how their day was
3. When your other group member joins then have them introduce themselves (name, how many years at Vine church and ask a few questions to find out what the new member does during the week and how they have been impacted by COVID-19).
4. Once everyone is in the meeting then introduce the new member formally. "This is ... tonight is their first night joining us and we are really excited to have them. It can be really hard to join an online group but we are really glad that you're here."
5. If the new member hasn't met everyone then get every member to introduce themselves (name, what they do during the week, how many years at Vine) "... you might not have had a chance to meet everyone. Let's go around and introduce ourselves, say what we do during the week, how many years I've been at Vine and what is the first thing I want to do once the lockout is over."
6. Give a description of the group
7. Outline what everyone is to expect during the night.
8. Start the Study
9. At the end of the study make sure that everyone says goodbye and make a point of saying that you enjoyed having the new member join you.

After their First time

The next day

1. Send a text or email to the new member to say it was great to have them
2. Ask whether you can add them to the group chat.
3. Add them to the group chat and write a note to say welcome. "Hey team, I've just added ... Welcome to the group!!!"

After first 2 weeks

1. Get in contact to see how they are finding the new group.

Additional Steps

1. Note down the people that the new person meets on the first night. If they haven't met any of the group members then make a point of introducing them when they are first in the group together.
2. Play a get to know you game that gets the group sharing each week to help the new member to get to know people. This will also help to keep the regular members connected to each other. It's win-win.

Example Conversations/Sample texts

First Phone call

“Hey Morris it’s Roger and I’m one of the Community Group leaders at Vine church. Andy has passed on your details to get you plugged into our group. We are really pumped to have you join us. We are generally based out of Camperdown and we meet each Wednesday night from 7:30 to 9pm. Our general pattern is to meet together and spend about 50 minutes looking at the Bible together and then we pray for each other. We have been reading the passage before we come too so I can send that to you. At the moment we are having our meetings over Zoom. Have you used Zoom before?... Of course, everyone is on it now! I’ll send you the meeting ID and the password so you can join us this coming Wednesday. Would it be possible for you to log on this week at 7:20 so I and one of the other members can have a quick chat with you and meet you face to face before the group is really full? ... Great. Well I’ll see you at 7:20 on Wednesday and I’ll send you the meeting login details!

Message to the group

“Hey legends, we have a new member joining us this week. His name is Morris and he is new to Vine church. It’s hard joining a Community Group online so when you join on Wednesday night then say hey to him, introduce yourself, say how many years you’ve been at Vine, and maybe ask what has changed for him in the pandemic. Isn’t it great that we are still growing and seeing new people join when we can’t even meet in our building each week!! See you all Wednesday.”

Message to group member

“Hey Travis, we have Morris joining us for the first time this week. Would you be able to log on 10 minutes early with me and chat to Morris to get to know him? We really want to give a warm welcome and having some time without too many people on Zoom really helps us to do that. Cheers mate.”

When members join group

“Hey Karen, welcome. This is Morris and tonight is his first night with us. Do you want to let him know what you do throughout the week and how long you’ve been a part of Vine??

When everyone is in the meeting

“Hey everyone, great to have you all here tonight. Everyone this is Morris and tonight is his first night joining us and we are really pumped to have him. It can be hard joining an online group so we are stoked you made the plunge to come along. Morris I’m not sure if you’ve had a chance to meet everyone. Let’s go around and introduce ourselves, say what we do during the week, how many years I’ve been at Vine and what is the first thing I want to do once the lockout is over. Helen why don’t you kick us off.”

Overview of the night/expectations

“Yeah nice one! Well, I know we didn’t do this too long ago but with Morris joining us for the first time I thought I’d share our group expectations that we agreed to which will help us to be a safe and close group. This is a group where we opt out rather than opt in. If you can’t make it then let us know and send a prayer point so we can pray for you. Otherwise we will expect you to be here. We respect each other and listen to what everyone has to say. Anyone can answer any question this isn’t just a discussion with the leader and one other. We keep everything confidential that is mentioned in this group. And the basis for our group is that the Bible is God’s word, it is reliable, trustworthy and authoritative. Did I miss anything? Ok cool. Let’s get into our study tonight on ... We will look at the Bible until about 8:20 and then we will share and pray with each other. To get us going”

When adding new member to chat

“Hey everyone, I’ve added Morris to our chat!! Woo hoo! Welcome Morris to the Camperdown Community Group!”

Key Takeaways

1. Joining an online group is more difficult than a group meeting in person
2. As a leader, we will need to work deliberately to integrate new people well
3. Make personal contact via a phone call to invite new member along
4. Give clear instructions and relevant details to the new member
5. Get new member to meet one other person before first meeting
6. Give clear instructions for the group to welcome new member
7. Makes sure everyone introduces themselves to the new person and shares about themselves
8. Make a point of welcoming the new member to the chat
9. Check in with them after the first 2 weeks to see how they are finding the group

KEEPING CONNECTED

One of the most significant challenges with the current distancing that our government requires is that we can become disconnected from each other. The regular patterns of human interaction that we have at work, Community Groups, Church, and other areas is no longer there in the same way. There aren't as many opportunities to catch up and have a coffee/beer and chat. Because of this possible isolation people can experience we have put together some key areas where we can foster a community of togetherness throughout the week to reduce some of the dangers of isolation.

Communication Channel

The first thing to make sure is that you have a consistent and shared communication channel established with you group. We don't mandate what these are but the important thing is that it is accessible to every member. Here are some channels we use regularly:

- WhatsApp
- Facebook messenger
- Facebook group
- iMessage

I'm sure there are more out there. My preference is for WhatsApp as it give instant messages that go to the whole group delivered immediately. This, I find, fosters an ability to be able to engage with each other throughout the day in real time.

Key Idea: Get a form of communication that everyone can access and keeps people connected.

Prayer

As it is whether we are in a pandemic or not, prayer is essential to our Christian walk. It is essential for our walk together as God's people. During this time to keep connected we want to foster a stop and pray attitude in our groups. With the use of our communication platform we have already established above we want the group to feel free to share what is going on for them and to know they are known and loved by the group.

To get this going then it may be best to recruit members of you group to share to establish the pattern from the group. As a leader we want to honour anyone who shares in the group and to stop and pray for whatever is asked.

Key Tip: Get our groups praying for each other in real time.

Checking in

It can be the opinion of some that all the responsibility for the group falls on the leaders. This however is a slightly consumeristic view of how our groups run. We are communities of Jesus followers who are growing together. Yes, the leaders have a responsibility but so do each of the group members. One of the ways we express our care and togetherness as a group is by following up our members when they aren't able to make it. If someone hasn't been able to make it then someone in the group should follow that person up the following day to see how they're going. It may be that they had to work late. Great! Someone should ask how they are managing a busy time at work. They may have had a family thing. Great! Someone should check and see how their family are going at the moment.

As a leader you might need to prompt this for some of your people but others will do this of their own accord. If possible get people to do that in the group chat so that the whole group can see that everyone is cared for and when you miss the group we want to still be looking out for you.

Key Tip: Follow up those who aren't able to make it so they feel like a part of the group.

Sundays

After a Sunday service, we would normally be able to catch up with others and see how they are going. We get this opportunity not only those in our group but those who are a part of our service too. Make a point of connecting with your group after a Sunday livestream. This might be through the Vine church Zoom meeting after the service. Or this could be a personal phone call or an exercise walk with someone who lives close. Connecting after a service isn't as easy now but that just means we will need to be more thoughtful and proactive about how we get that after the Sunday livestream.

This is my recommendation each week after Sunday service.

- Each week join the Vine Church Zoom after service hangout.
- Text 1 person who is in your group and pray for them
- Text 1 person who isn't in your group and pray for them

Key Tip: Actively pursue after Sunday service fellowship with others in your group and part of your service.

Triplets/Smaller Groups

Finally, you might be able to break your group down into smaller accountability groups to help people to keep connected. Some of our groups are quite large and so it is impossible to be able to keep up with everyone every week. Breaking this down into smaller groups of 3 or 4 will help people to keep connected and spreads the load of following up everyone in the group. You may already have these in your group. Great! In which case then communicate to them that you should be there for each other and that is your first port of call for who you are going to pray for each week.

Key Tip: Break group down into smaller triplets to make sure everyone is connected to someone else

Key Takeaways

1. Establish a communication channel in the group that is accessible, easy-to-use, and provides notifications for new messages.
2. Make a point of sharing and praying for each other in real time during the week.
3. When someone can't make it to the group then check in with them the following day.
4. Make a point of connecting with others from your group and form your service on a Sunday.
5. Break group up into smaller groups that can look out for each other.

SAMPLE WEEK AND SAMPLE MEETING**Sample Week**

Day	Action
Saturday	<u>45 minutes – 1 hour</u> : working through the passage to get the big idea. Asking and trying to answer any big questions that come up as I read through. Understand the context, make observations about what is in the passage, try to get to a single sentence meaning of the passage, write down what application I need to make in response to what I have read. Pray
Monday	<u>45 minutes – 1 hour</u> : go back over my big idea. Work on the questions I am going to ask the group. What is my best and most engaging opening question? How am I going to get the group looking at the passage? What do I see in the passage and how does it fit together? What should we as a group do because of this word? I'll spend most of my time working through the study notes and crafting questions that will move people through to the application. Pray <u>Send out text to the group with pre-work questions</u> . Gee the group up for our meeting. (Note : sometimes I'll do this on a Sunday if I have prepared Saturday then Sunday)
Tuesday (Group Night)	<u>30 minutes</u> : Go back over my questions, read the passage one more time. Pray for the group time and for the people in the group. Prepare myself to greet people warmly and to bring energy to the group. <u>1 hour – 1 ½ hours</u> : Lead the group through the discussion and run a prayer time with the group. (More detail on this below.)
Wednesday	Fill in the attendance report for the group. Note who was missing from the group the night before and text them. Or get someone else in the group to check in with them. Think about the next week and pray for my group to put into action the things we spoke about last night.

Sample Meeting

Time	Activity
7:20	Log onto online meeting and prepare to greet people
7:30-7:40	Greet people as they arrive and get people talking
7:40-7:50	Opening question to engage people and get everyone talking
7:50-8:20	Group discussion on the Bible including looking at the passage, breakout room, move towards main point, application of main point practically for each of our lives.
8:20-9:00	Prayer time. Everyone has a chance to share and be prayed for
9:00-9:10	Farewell everyone as they leave the group. Have other random conversations as you would after a group meeting in person. This is a chance to encourage your members for the week.

- This is a sample week and Sample meeting.
- Sample week is based on a Tuesday night community group
- Sample meeting is roughly based on a group of 10. With the 4 minute average for prayer time that will mean the group need 40 minutes to pray for each other.
- To alleviate time pressure on prayer you can utilise breakout prayer groups or triplets if you already have those established. If using breakout rooms then be sure to give a specific time so that you can get everyone back together before leaving for the night. This gives everyone a chance to say goodbye at the end of the night.

FEEDBACK AND PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FROM LEADERS

What has worked well in your group?

- Breakout rooms
- Using our WhatsApp group during the week has been really helpful in still feeling connected, sending out the passage before Wednesday night is good so people can come along already having done some work in the passage. This really helps facilitate discussion on the night.
- Continuing the community group connection by seeing each other online.
- Break out rooms for discussion
- Structure and clarity. Moving prayer to the start of the meeting
- Starting with prayer has worked well to check in with each other
- Breaking in to smaller groups and then meeting up again as one group... zoom allows us to do this.
- NOT having dinner has meant decent time for both prayer and study in the 1 ½ hours
- Meeting in mini-groups for prayer meant 3-4 in each online call - was good to have each person actively participating - but of course means you miss out on seeing the whole group.
- Size of group - 4 people, drinking a shared bottle of wine together
- Clear moderator, eating meals together, camera on
- The flexibility of meeting online allowed for busy members to attend on time. Typically our group is fairly open to sharing, so a leaving room for an organic, conversational style study allows for more contemplation on how the Word applies to our lives.
- Sending out prework

What have you found most difficult?

- Finding a time that suits and getting the members seeing meeting as a priority given their personal demands with kids at home and other distractions.
- Talking as a group over Zoom is tricky. It's harder to read body language and so sometimes people talk over each other or are unsure when it's their turn to talk. I find talking/facilitating over Zoom is more tiring.
- Online meeting is easier but not better in terms of fellowship and sharing the word of God. Feel distance than closeness
- Generating discussion with everyone in the same room, the dominant tend to become more dominant
- Obviously the lag. But that cannot be changed
- Facilitating discussion and getting everyone talking is the hardest part over the screen
- It's hard to get the quiet members to talk... they put their mic on mute and are then reluctant to unmute
- The rhythms of conversation are REALLY hard with video once you have more than two or three users – though this is largely due to tech and I don't know how it can be helped
- Online has made it hard to understand emotionally members are at. To then to do the study best as possible also I'm not really a big fan of meeting on line makes already a difficult situation hard.
- Energy - people are quiet and tired from the work day, real effort to dial in to another Zoom call after many have long work days of Zoom. People sitting on their couches and watching the laptop sets them up to be passive viewers. The studies caught up to the sermon has slowed discussion as it's repeating what people just heard a couple of days ago. Earlier in the series it was good focusing on different parts of the passage to the sermon.
- Getting a time that works, schedules have changed, ,
- Internet connection instability, flowing discussion, unable to see visual cues on when there is a gap to speak.

- It's been a little difficult to look and pray beyond our individual situations to ask for God's leading, and perhaps to surrender to God in all uncertainty.
- Many people have limited time due to increased work demands from remote work responsibilities.
- Getting the technology to work

Hints or tips to help online group experience?

- Having a co leader in your Zoom meeting
- Pre-reading of the passage, we've also done some music over Zoom with different members playing instruments and the others singing.
- Using big screen TV or laptop is better than mobile phone to see all.
- Breaking up into smaller groups, quite directed questions, pre-work
- Move prayer to the start for each other. Have a writer scribing the pray points and send it before prayer. So people know what to pray for for the next of the week. Also, people get much more tired online, so move prayer forward.
- Try the breakout groups on zoom
- Having a facilitator who calls on each person to contribute - and make sure everyone knows it's ok not to say anything - helps the flow of conversation so people aren't speaking over the top of each other. Muting all mics when not speaking makes it less natural, but helps amazingly for background noise and also stopping people talking over each other. The meeting host can control this from their meeting so individuals uncomfortable with tech aren't fussing around trying to figure it out. We also played with Virtual Backgrounds for something fun.
- Smaller sizes, meet at similar time, use sms outside of time together,
- Cameras on
- Simply seeing each other's faces and being able to share and pray with one another helps. Keeping in touch every few days with a meme and a word of encouragement helps connect us during the week.
- Allow more space for members to raise their own concerns and allow plenty of opportunity to take this to God in prayer.
- Get the facilitator to bring people in specifically to the conversation

VINE CHURCH
ENGAGING IN AN ONLINE COMMUNITY

VINE CHURCH
Engaging in an
Online Community



OUR SITUATION SO FAR

This year we have seen incredible change as a church community. We never thought that we would be in lockdown, but God is still sovereign and this time can be a challenging time of care and growth as a community.

STAYING CONNECTED ON SUNDAYS

When we gather, we can see who is there and who has had a hard week, but online this is much harder. The best way to do this is to let us know that you tuned in on Sunday (www.vinechurch.com.au/hello) and fill in the care form (www.vinechurch.com.au/care) to keep us updated on your practical and spiritual needs.



COMMUNITY GROUPS AND CARE

Our community groups are the main place for pastoral care. They are places where we are seeking to love each other and they are the best spot for this close care to take place. **This isn't just the work of the leaders but every member** has the privilege of being able to support and care for each other.

STAYING RELATIONALLY CONNECTED

A great way to stay connected is to organise a call or video-chat with your Community Group before the service and pray together. You might want to call or text your group during the week to encourage them and pray for them.



KEEP YOUR WEEKLY ROUTINE

As the novelty of online contact wears off, it can be really hard to maintain the same level of commitment and care for our community. Make it a priority to keep joining your community group and tuning in on Sundays, keeping the weekly rhythms of life together.

MAKE A GROWTH PLAN

Vine Church will be in this situation for (at least) a few months, so think about how you can grow in your faith during this time. It might be listening to sermons online, joining a prayer triplet or deciding on a couple of Christian books you'd like to read. Aim to come out the other end of this loving and follow God even more.



KEEP THINGS VISIBLE

We'd love to see what you are up to! Post photos of your Sunday set up, community group during the week and engage with Vine Church online.

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS, PLEASE DO NOT
HESITATE TO GET IN CONTACT WITH US VIA
HELLO@VINECHURCH.COM.AU

VINE CHURCH
IDEAS FOR ONLINE GAMES

Game	Number of players	How it works	Where to find it	Description	Notes
Codenames	unlimited	Get a unique game link and share it with friends	This website	Give a one word clue to help your team identify words on a board	works perfect with a Google Hangout
Ludo King	4-players	Download for iPhone or iPad and follow the instructions in the app	The App store	Be the first person to move 4 tokens from the starting point around the board to the center of the board.	
Catan	multi-player	Download for iPhone or iPad and follow the instructions in the app	This website	Expand your colony through the building of settlements, roads, and villages by harvesting commodities from the land around you (Google)	
PhotoRoulette	multi-player	Download the app and send the unique link to friends to play	The App Store	Give the app access to your camera roll and then guess which of your friends' photos is the one that comes up.	
Play Link Games	multi-player	Pair your phone to your PS4	This website	Buy different games to enjoy	
Club Penguin	solo	Head to the URL and feel all the nostalgia come flooding back (meet you in the pizza making room)	Right here!	Create a penguin life for yourself and explore the online world with your pet, a Puffle.	
Words With Friends	multi-player	Download for iPhone or iPad and follow the instructions in the app	The App Store	Think smartphone scrabble!	
Draw Something	multi-player	Download for iPhone or iPad and follow the instructions in the app	The App Store	Think smartphone pictinary!	
Live Streamed Trivia	multi-player	Head to the URL and check out when you can tune in to play a live trivia game	This article	Tune in to live streamed questions where you guess the answers to earn points.	
Jackbox Games	multi-player	Have one of your friends buy a package and share their screen via Zoom or Google Hangouts	This website	Buy different games to enjoy	
Keep Talking and No One Explodes	multi-player	Head to the link for instructions!	This website	One person sees the bomb while the others talk him/her through how to diffuse it	
Communal Puzzles	multi-player	Work together on a selection of jigsaw puzzles	This website	Puzzle away!	
Game Pigeon	2-players	Send the game in your iPhone's iMessage	This article to show you how	iMessage games like Pool or Beer Pong to your friends.	
Untitled Goose Game	solo	Download for your tech!	This website	Control a goose that bothers a village.	
Stardew Valley	solo	Download for your tech!	This website	After inheriting your grandpa's farm, you have a few tools to get your new life off the ground.	

Don't Starve Together	multi-player	Buy a bundle from the site and get playing	This website	Gather resources and craft items to help you survive in this wilderness game	This is a team version of the solo player survival game, Don't Starve
LA Noire	solo	Buy a bundle from the site and get playing	This website	Get ready for spy drama!	
Nancy Drew Games	solo	You act as Nancy Drew to find clues and solve mysteries	https://www.herinteractive.com/shop-games/all-games/	Nancy Drew time!	They can sometimes be kind of expensive but they're really fun and immersive.
Skip po	2-4	Download the app	App Store for Apple and Android	It's a card game the aim is to get rid of your stack of cards before any other player. You do this by stacking them in numerical order.	It has a tutorial that fully explains the game
Drawful	3+	Similar to pictionary	https://shop.jackboxgames.com/collections/steam-codes/products/drawful-2	Everyone plays on their own phone, one person shares their screen. Everyone draws in response to a personal prompt and then the group tries to guess the real title.	Currently Drawful 2 is free!
Board Game Arena	Depends on the game	This is a website where all kinds of tabletop games can be played virtually (turn-based or real time)	https://en.boardgamearena.com/	Play games like checkers, chess, Catan, and Hanabi!	"Currently experiencing high traffic", so you'll need to register a free account if you want access. Outside of high traffic you can play as a guest.
Two Spies	2 players, or you can play against a bot.	Available on iOS.	https://playspies.com/	You are a spy, and your goal is to control cities, and find the other spy before they find you!	So much fun, and so satisfying when you win!
Trivia LA	Any! You can do it alone or have teams virtually!	Live streams on Facebook for people to play along at home! There's a google doc she provides to keep score and record answers while you watch the livestream.	https://www.facebook.com/playtriviala/		Definitely geared toward adult users
Pandemic	4	Log in through steam and share screen through google hangouts.	https://store.steamowered.com/app/622440/Pandemic_The_Board_Game/	Disease has broken out in the world- stop it from spreading!	
Ticket to Ride	4	Download app on phone or steam.	App store	Collect and play cards to claim railway routes and win	
NY Daily Crossword	Just one other person minimum!	It's an app, then you can share your time with anyone else!		a daily crossword appears and you try to finish it as fast as possible.	
Card Games	2+	Allows access to card games like Cards Against	http://playingcards.io/	Choose a game and play!	

		Humanity, Euchre and Checkers.			
Multiple games	2+	Euchre, etc	https://www.playok.com/		
Cards Against Humanities	3-6		http://playingcards.io/game/cards-against-humanity	Answer a prompt with your set of cards.	
Yahtzee	2+	Purchase the classic board game for you and your quarantine buddies	https://www.amazon.com/Classic-Yahtzee-Exciting-Skill-Chance/dp/B00B28GVLG	The game is played with five dice, and if you get five dice all with the same number, then you've scored a 'Yahtzee'. The name of the game is also the name of the best hand.	Classic board game!
Skribbl	Up to 12	Digital Pictionary! Join a private room with friends (up to 12) or join an online group with strangers. Draw a word while everyone else guesses, points are awarded.	https://skribbl.io/	Pictionary!	Even more fun if you can simultaneously be on a voice or video chat so you can talk to each other while playing.
Overcooked	1-4	Play the game online!	https://www.team17.com/games/overcooked/	Cook up meals in kooky kitchens.	Good for all ages. Playable on PS4, Xbox, and Steam.
Evil Apples	3+	Very similar to Cards Against Humanity!	https://www.evillapples.com/	Answer a prompt with your set of cards.	the game is explicit so may not be appreciated by some that do not appreciate that type of humor.
Bunker Bundle	2+	Buy the physical game, or join a virtual play party on Zoom (first one is next Wednesday (3/25) at 8pm EST	https://www.thebundlegame.com/bunker-bundle	Make your way around the board, answering cards in four categories. The first person to land on "The Final Bundle" space and answer the card wins the game! (Bundle)	
Scattergories	Multi-player	Traditional scattergories rules	https://swellgario.com/scattergories/	Get a letter and a list of categories! if you and a friend write the same word for that category, starting with that letter, you can't get a point.	One person can open the website and then share their screen using Google Hangouts or Zoom
Colonist	can play buy yourself or up to 4 for free	It's basically Catan but you can play on a computer and link up with friends	https://colonist.io	Build your empire game!	
The Oregon Trail	solo	Use keyboard keys to hunt	https://classicreload.com/oregon-trail.html	Hunt and survive in the wild wild west	
Dominion	2+	It's a deck building game that you can play online.	https://dominion.games/	Each player uses a separate deck of cards and draw their hands from their own decks, not those of others. (Google)	
PSYCH	3+	Everyone downloads the app and you can play together	https://apps.apple.com/us/app/psych-outwit-your-friends/id1005765746	Try and throw your friends off by inventing definitions and fake trivia answers. Everyone plays from their phones!	It's part of Ellen's suite of games (like Heads Up!)
Tabletop	Unlimited	Download games	https://store.st	A simulator for your favorite	May not be

Simulator	(based on game that you pick)	from the Steam workshop, load them, and invite other users that have Tabletop Simulator to play	eampowered.com/app/286160/Tabletop_Simulator/	boardgames!	suited for all computers, as it is essentially a physics simulator for boardgames.
Wavelength	2+	Check out this site -->	https://www.wavelength.zone/	It's a party game where you give clues to guess the right answer! The clue-giver knows where on a spectrum of two opposite terms the "target" is, and has to give a single clue to get the people they're playing with to understand where the target might be. You can play it as a competitive team thing or just a conversation starter!	
Kahoot	Best with 4+	Create your own quiz/trivia game!	kahoot.com/	Create your own quiz/trivia game; for free, you can do multiple choice, and for an annual membership (\$60, which I am recouping by having friends Venmo me \$1 per person every game) you can do a "write in" answer so it's more like classic trivia.	It's designed for educational games to be used in schools, and it's also a great option for parents who are picking up the lion's share of homeschooling right now.
HouseParty	2+	Download the HouseParty app, add friends. This integrates video chatting and a few game knockoffs (Trivia, HeadsUp, [like]CardsAgainst Humanity, and DrawIt)	https://houseparty.com/	Video chat your friends, similar to Zoom but with games added into the interface	
Exploding Kittens	2-5	Very similar to the real-life card game version!	https://explodingkittens.com/mobile-app	Play cards to make other players take actions or extra turns, and end each turn by drawing a new card - which could be an exploding kitten. If you can't "defuse" the exploding kitten, you're out!	Fun to play on your phones while all on zoom or facetime on another device so you can still see each other and chat! We were all giggling over the silly illustrations and sound effects.
Hogwart's Digital Escape Room	1 or more	You can do it on your own, as a couple, as a family. And you can compete with others via video chat - just start it at the same time, put a timer on, and see who finishes the fastest!	https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfINxNM0jzbZJjUqOcXkwhGTfii4CM_CA3kCxImbY8c3AABEA/viewform?fbclid=IwAR0Xvj-q13R9-CypWIUSqBlbi	This is a virtual escape room hosted on Google Forms!	

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Once Upon A Time	2- 8	It's a card storytelling game.	https://www.amazon.com/Atlas-Games-ATG1030-Once-Upon/dp/1589781317	It begins with a classic Once Upon a Time card . Each player's goal is to play all their story cards and the ending card!	
Wink Murder Mystery	6+, best for bigger groups	Murder mystery game!	https://drive.google.com/open?id=17moDcUYuCZXBiwROZl506HfeElZy0H8JkG7W6_tNDqc	In a group, one person is chosen as the "murderer". Everyone else has to try to guess who it is before they come for you!	