

## Online Bible study groups

### Aim of this document

The aim of this document is to help Bible study leaders to facilitate and lead an online Bible study. Staff workers of ISM can use this document to give an online training to the leaders within their group.

### Document structure

A Bible study evening consists of different sections. You can give one section more attention and time than another. This depends on what you think is most important for your Bible study group. In this document I will discuss the different aspects you can include. You can then use these as building blocks to build a Bible study evening that fits within your context. In the appendix you will find technical help and other materials and tips that can help you to use the different building blocks.

### Online program

There are many different programs available to facilitate an online meeting. In this document the focus will be on ZOOM, as this is an easy program to use and quite popular at the moment. Although much of the information is also useful when working with another program.

Online meetings always have a safety risk. For that matter be sure to read about the safety of your ZOOM meeting in the appendix.

### Managing your expectations

Most people find having an online meeting quite exhausting. Communication will also feel different compared to being together in real life. It is important to pay attention to those aspects when you prepare and lead an online meeting. Do not go about as usual but think about a fitting schedule. Important aspects to consider are:

- **Time:** plan a meeting with a maximum of 1 hour and a quarter
- **Communicating:** you are missing out on most of the non-verbal communication, so the chance of miscommunication is much higher than normal. For that matter it is helpful to ask clear questions.
- **Involvement:** people can feel distanced from the meeting and might have a lot of distractions in their room. This can have an impact on the way people are involved in your meeting. To help people stay connected you can call people by name when you share a question
- **Schedule:** Your time in one meeting is limited. For that matter make sure you have a realistic schedule. Think about which section is the most needed in your group at the moment. If there is not enough time to cover everything, skip the other sections or use them in another meeting.

- **Zoom:** with the free version of zoom you can be in the meeting room for 40 minutes. You can use the same link again to get into the room for another 40 minutes. So after the first 40 minutes you can plan a short break while everyone reconnects.
- **Bible study:** Use a passage of no more than 10-15 verses. If you would like to provide more context, ask everyone to read the passages in advance.

## Building blocks for the Bible study meeting

### Building block 1: Personal contact

Most students feel the need to share how they are doing in this uncertain time. Be aware of this need and plan time to facilitate this. Some ideas that can help you to fill this time:

- **Leadership:** People might be hesitant to start talking. You can place the names of all participants in the chatroom. Then you can ask everyone to share in the order of their names. Forming a 'digital round' in this way provides clarity and structure.
- **Focus:** some people might feel the need to share a lot. Other people might not know what to share at all. It is helpful to ask a clear question. You can even share the question in advance so people have some time to think about what they would like to share.
- **Safety:** It is possible that some people in your group do not have a private space for the Bible Study. Maybe there are more people in their room who could be listening in. This can have an impact on the way people feel sharing personal thoughts. You can communicate in advance or in the beginning of the evening on this matter.

### Building block 2: prayer

For many people, praying in front of a camera may be new or feel a bit strange. To help people relax and be involved it is helpful to have a clear structure and communicate it.

Some ideas to continue to pray with your small group:

- **Collect:** collect the prayerpoints in the chatroom
- **Divide:** be clear about who is going to pray for a topic. You can choose one person who prays for all the points or divide the points between different participants. In that case make an overview in the chatroom with who is going to pray for which point
- **Breakout groups:** You can also choose to invite people for a breakout group. In that way they can pray with two or three persons for the prayerpoints or for each other. You can combine this with the personal contact time

### Building block 3: worship

The goal of worship is that people open their heart and meet God in whichever circumstances they are. Most often, people choose the form of singing Christian worship songs together. This part of the Bible study evening might be the most complicated to do online. There are some ideas you can give a try. It is great if you find a way to worship God together in this time. However be aware that trying new things does not make it too uncomfortable for people. You want to keep your online meeting a safe space.

- **Agreement:** Before you start with your worship time make sure you have reached an agreement on this topic. Things to discuss: Is it possible for everyone to worship together? Maybe people are in a room in which it is not possible for them to join in. Will you mute your mike during the worship time?

- **Live band:** If there are people in your group who can play an instrument and sing, you can ask if they feel comfortable to lead the worship online.
- **Youtube:** You can also use songs from Youtube to sing along. By sharing your screen and audio everyone can follow at the same time.
- **Music choice:** In this time filled with uncertainty and fear it might be helpful to choose music that is known and dear to the people in your group.
- **Listening:** You can also choose a song that is fitting with the topic of your bible study. Listen to it together and let the topic of that evening already sink in
- **Spiritual disciplines:** instead of using music, you can also search for other fitting ways to meet God for example Lectio Divina or daily examen (see appendix)

#### Building block 4: Bible study

Bible study is normally the heart of the evening. It takes most of your time and has high priority. Putting your Bible study in an online format takes quite a lot of your creativity and flexibility. This starts with managing your expectations. Your Online Bible study will always be different than a Bible study that you are used to doing in person. Don't be too hard on yourself or your small group when things are different. Take the time to explore what works and what does not work at all for your group. Remember, your aim is still to meet God even though the format might be different.

Some guidelines that can help you decide on the length of your passage.

- **10-15 Bible verses:** if you have a passage of this length, you probably will not be able to do a full bible study in one evening. I would recommend doing the observation and first part of interpretation ahead of your Bible study. By using Google docs to group all the insights together. On the evening itself you can start with discussing the different interpretations.
- **4-6 Bible Verses:** If you have a passage that is this short, you can try to do the whole Bible study in the evening itself. You can use the OIA method or use a method that is aimed on meditation.

#### Observation

- **Preparation:** You can send some observation questions ahead. Your small group members can answer the questions in advance.
- **Annotation tools:** When you share your screen with the bible verses, everyone can adapt by using the annotation tools. You can do the observation together by using signs for different observation questions. For example, underlining words that appear multiple times or coloring everything that has to do with time or place green. If you do that together at the same moment you will get an interactive observation session.

#### Interpretation

- **Questions:** note questions that come to mind after the observation. You can send them ahead as part of the preparation or on the evening itself in the chatroom
- **Movies:** You can watch some informative movies together by sharing your screen to get insight into the Bible passage. Extra information can be found in The Bible project, Bible commentaries or Christian Q&A webpages.

- **Opinion:** You can use online tools to figure out the opinion of the small group on a question of topic. For example; mentimeter
- **Whiteboard:** Share the whiteboard in zoom for interactive questions. For example, a mindmap or mood board around the topic of the evening

### Application

- **Short introduction:** when you are leading the smallgroup, you can start by giving a short introduction to the Bible passage. If you have prepared something together in advance, you can use this information. This way, everyone is focused on the passage and theme of the evening.
- **Breakout groups:** split your group into smaller groups by using 'breakout groups'. You can ask these groups to discuss a particular question. When the breakout groups are finished you can ask them to summarise their observations/answers.
- **Mission:** together you can find a way to apply the Bible words to your own life in the week to come. If you have a regular Bible study, you can choose to reflect on these applications the next time you meet.

### Social

During a normal gathering you have lots of informal time together, such as eating together. You can think of ways to facilitate this online. It may be something you need to plan a different evening for. The goal is to continue to grow closer especially in this time when people are isolated and maybe lonely.

- **Atmosphere:** create a nice atmosphere by asking everyone to have their own food and drinks during your time together. Eating and drinking together has an amazing impact on the atmosphere in the group.
- **Activity:** Think of an activity you could do together. An online game, quiz or some fun questions...

## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Zoom basics

When you click the link below you are led to a training session with the basics of zoom.

- How to make an account
- Important settings
- How to plan a zoom meeting
- Inviting people to your meeting
- Sharing your screen in the zoom meeting
- Important settings when you are the host of the meeting
- **Link:** [https://greenfaith.zoom.us/rec/play/ucYolumtq243G9fAswSDUPArW9W-eKis1Cga8\\_EPmk7mAnFQMAevZ7IQZefBr9eLpOtBNxuUZZ4WFxrQ?continueMode=true&fbclid=IwAR0DHJS6Tqk262Mi3pGTmQ9X8nFQI5yeKlAQk1\\_FRNBeKm8PARCIYaof4MQ](https://greenfaith.zoom.us/rec/play/ucYolumtq243G9fAswSDUPArW9W-eKis1Cga8_EPmk7mAnFQMAevZ7IQZefBr9eLpOtBNxuUZZ4WFxrQ?continueMode=true&fbclid=IwAR0DHJS6Tqk262Mi3pGTmQ9X8nFQI5yeKlAQk1_FRNBeKm8PARCIYaof4MQ)

## Appendix 2: Breakout groups

The host of the zoom meeting has the possibility to divide the group into smaller groups. This option is called 'breakout groups' in zoom. By using this option you will improve the involvement of your participants. You can use it to pray in small groups or discuss a question. The following video will show you how to start and manage a breakout group.

**Link:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j\\_07rDILNCM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_07rDILNCM)

## Appendix 3: Share screen and annotation tools

Zoom gives you the possibility to share your screen. You can share a program that is opened on your computer, a particular document or an empty whiteboard. It is also possible to share the audio of your computer. The following video will give you instructions on this topic.

**Link:** <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362153-How-Do-I-Share-My-Screen->

When you click share screen, you also get the option of 'annotation tools'. With this setting all the participants can start to adapt the document on the screen by underlining, colouring or highlighting things. By clicking the following link you will find instructions on how to use the annotation tools.

**Link:** <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/115005706806-Using-annotation-tools-on-a-shared-screen-or-whiteboard>

## Appendix 4: Information on all kinds of zoom options

Zoom has information on all kinds of options within zoom. By clicking the following link you will be led to the information webpage of zoom.

**Link:** <https://zoom.us/resources>

Zoom has a special COVID-19 page with more information especially for this time. There you can also find training possibilities on how to get the most out of your zoom meetings.

**Link:** [https://zoom.us/docs/en-us/covid19.html?utm\\_source=website&utm\\_medium=postattendee&utm\\_campaign=COVID19FY21&zcid=3709](https://zoom.us/docs/en-us/covid19.html?utm_source=website&utm_medium=postattendee&utm_campaign=COVID19FY21&zcid=3709)

## Appendix 5: digital safety

Working and meeting online has a safety risk. This is the case for every online program or tool you are using. Zoom has been in the news a few times on this topic. To make sure that zoom is as safe as possible, the host can use the safety settings. Things like:

- Use a random meeting ID instead of your personal meeting ID
- Create a password for the zoom meeting
- Participants can use the link to the meeting only after the host has activated it
- Create a waiting room for people who want to join your meeting
- Settings on sharing your screen and use of the chatroom

If you want to know more about the safety of zoom and the right settings, use their webpage.

: <https://zoom.us/security>

## Appendix 6: Bible study method

The OIA (Inductive) method is a worldwide method used for Bible studies. By using this method you break the bible study up into three parts.

Observation: What does the passage say? Example questions:

- Narrating passages; Who, what, when, where?
- Poetic passages; Are there any recurring themes in the passage? Metaphors?
- Profetic passages or letters; Metaphors? Keywords?

Interpretation: What does the text mean? Example questions:

- Narrating passages; How? Why?
- Poetic passages; Compare and discuss recurring themes? How do you experience the metaphors?
- Profetic passages or letters; meaning of ideas, keywords and metaphors. How is the passage built up? What is the message of the tekst?

Application: What is your response to the passage?

- What are the things that stand out to you in the passage?
- How will you do things differently in the coming week as a response to the passage?
- We move from worship to action

The following video gives a clear explanation of the inductive method:

- **Link:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0W5XKGSjLLU>

## Appendix 7: questions for Personal contact

During the time of personal contact your focus is on the (spiritual) wellbeing of the participants. Some people might talk a lot while others don't talk at all. To keep your focus it is helpful to have clear questions. You could use the following questions as an example.

- Which three things make you grateful?
- What are you struggling with at the moment?
- Which things have been on your mind the last week?
- What is the impact of this period on your social life?
- What are you currently missing most?
- Which things have you learned or experienced recently?
- How do you experience God in this period?

## Appendix 8: Evening Schedule

Your time and attention are limited. For that matter you have to make decisions about which building blocks you would like to use in one meeting. The following examples can give you a picture gives an example on how you could choose to do that.

## Appendix 9: Spiritual disciplines

### Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina was developed in the early Christian Church. It is used in various monastic orders where it is practiced and developed further. It is an age old way of meditating on the words of the Bible. The focus lies on what the words of the tekst evokes in, and says to you. With this method, you trust that the Holy Spirit will guide you in what is important at that moment.

#### How does it work?

#### Here are some links (in Dutch) which may be helpful

**Link:** [https://www.protestantsekerk.nl/ideeenbank/lectio-divina-wat-god-de-lezer-vandaag-wil-](https://www.protestantsekerk.nl/ideeenbank/lectio-divina-wat-god-de-lezer-vandaag-wil-zeggen/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIxcGMupvW6AIV1uF3Ch1KVgatEAAAYASAAEgIRsFD_BwE)

**Link:** <https://www.biddeniseenweg.nl/toerusting/de-praktijk-van-het-bidden/67-lectio-divina-persoonlijk-en-in-groepsverband>

To do this virtually, you can do the following:

- Have the Bible passage read by a recorded version of a specific translation (i.e. YouVersion)
- Participants can share their ideas in the chat
- You can divide the participants into smaller groups to make sharing easier.
- During the reflection time, you can turn your camera off so that people are not distracted.

### Daily examen

The 'Daily Examen' is a method developed in Monastic life. Many Christians follow the steps of this method at a set time every day, for example; at the end of every day of the week. Through the aid of questions, this method helps to reflect on your feelings and experiences of the past day/period. The answers tot he question scan be used to form prayers.

**How does it work?**

- Share a document with the table below in the chat.
- Give participants time to write down their questions.
- During the reflection time, you can turn your camera off so that people are not distracted.
- Participants can share their experiences through working on a shared document, in the chat or in breakout groups.
- Voor meer info: <https://www.24-7prayer.com/theartofexamen>
- Daily/Weekly Examen

Name	Where have you experienced God's presence?	Where have you experienced God's absence?