

Bible Companion Fellowship App / addition to the existing Bible Companion app

I am putting this up as a suggestion to be pulled apart. And thereby improved and honed. To get the ball of thought rolling, it helps to have a concrete suggestion. I have tried to incorporate all suggestions even if some of them I'm not very positive about personally. I'm submitting it to the developers so they can digest it, and then brainstorm with me face to face. They may well have different suggestions, and will be able to point out technical issues / barriers / possibilities.

Preferably, it'd be integrated as a menu item into the existing Bible Companion app. The opening page of the existing app would remain as is, but with a "Splash" advertising this virtual church.

1

Why do people go to church? What do they do when there?

To learn about God through listening to someone explain the Bible. To discuss the teaching in small groups. To at times be part of a much larger group, sitting together listening to a speaker. To break bread [take communion]. To get baptized. To meet with other believers. To chat. To make friends. To listen to worship music. To hear testimonies / positive stories from other believers. To pray. To share what God has done for you. To personally talk to someone more mature than you about your spiritual issues and questions.

It's all these things we need to include in the app.

There are tens of thousands of people actively using the existing Bible Companion app. So the best thing would be to have this "app" as in fact an extension of the existing app- a tab called something like "Virtual church" or "Online church". All those users can then interact with each other. What's important is that they can interact with each other in real time. There is no existing church app which seems to offer this- so we'd be offering something absolutely new.

The following is an attempt to envisage an app which would enable these things- but there are surely many ways to do this, and probably better ways to do it than what is here proposed. But there has to be something to get the brainstorming going. So, here it is.

2 AVATARS

Registered members have an account, including details of their communication platforms which they wish to share with others [Facebook, Skype, WhatsApp, email, VK]. They have the choice to share these details with all users, or just with "friends". For registered members, the avatar can be built up as on Roblox and Snapchat. This would mean that e.g. a woman could wear a head covering for meetings if she wished, characters could dress smart or informal, change their hair:



Save



Hairstyle





Save



Body Type





Save



Body Type



I realize this kind of thing is common stuff for younger folks. The problem with the entire animation approach is that older folks find it looks rather immature and plastic. I suggest a way to ameliorate this is for there to be the opportunity to upload your actual photo to your profile, a head and shoulders photo, that could then be incorporated in the “face” element of the avatar. There may ideally be a way of automatically checking that it is indeed a face photo that’s been uploaded for this purpose, and not anything else or something pornographic. Likewise with the church compound, it may be that photos of actual buildings could somehow be used. Possibly from the Riga Bible Center. I mean we have photos of people in small groups in the lounge, and also of the whole church in session. I’m sure there are many such photos around. I’m just unsure how they could be meshed into a digital animation environment where an avatar is moved around a screen.

Visitors would be given a standard avatar to move around and explore, with encouragement to register and become a member. The idea is that you are within a church compound and move your avatar around the screen into a room or to a discussion table of your choice . There would be a team of real live people, “The Pastoral Team”, available 24/7 to answer questions, direct visitors to the area they want, chat with them etc.

3

OPENING SCREEN

Users have an avatar, or visitors are assigned one. The user enters the church compound, which would be something similar to a scene on a Roblox game, where one can zoom in and out of the entire scene. Visitors need not register- but perhaps they must first be given a temporary registration as on the chat app Christian Chat, which is on Google Play <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.christianchat.app&hl=en> or www.christianchat.com. As they enter the church, they are automatically greeted by a member of the Pastoral Team- a group of registered users who have higher privileges. But the greeting is automatic- the avatar comes up to the entering visitor and greets them, in a speech bubble and / or audio message. Telling them a bit about the church, and the various features.





The user enters the church. If as a visitor, then an avatar from the Pastoral Team meets them as explained above, welcoming them and explaining how things work and what's on offer. This doesn't happen if they're a registered user.

They move their avatar around as in the app Virtual Father Church Manager

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.dumpgames.virtual.good.father&hl=en>

The idea from this game is simply of the person moving around a room with various doors in it. These would be labelled as above, they would be the various "areas" or "rooms". Forget that the sample game mentioned has a priest as the character. That would be replaced by the user's avatar. In that game, there is a table and chairs. There would be quite a few of these. These would be for small group chat. The avatar is moved to the table, a chair is pulled out and they are seated. They can then be approached by others at that table to chat on a one to one level- on the chat function within the app [similar to the "Christian Chat" app I mentioned above, or to the chat function on Roblox, although with microphone option as there is there].

They have the option to stand up and say "Amen" when in one of the formal church meetings, i.e. in any of the areas / rooms in section 4, apart from when chatting at the tables.



4

Rooms / areas within the church compound

The church compound would include the following “rooms” or areas:

4.1 Breaking of Bread; it might be called “The big top”, i.e. the main room, where a full church service is going on with music, prayers, sermon etc.

4.2 Prayer

4.3 Baptism

4.4 Bible Basics

4.5 Christian Basics

4.6 Missionary Training Program

4.7 Bible Study

4.8 Bible Prophecy

4.9 Chat with the pastoral team

4.10 Bible reading room

4.11 Various tables and chairs within the building for chatting. Maximum of 7 people around each table

4.12 Personal Testimony

4.13 Missionary Work

4.14 Outside the church building, but within the compound, one or more areas / rooms labelled “Out of church Christians” and possibly one “Smoking area”. These would be areas for those who feel they are “out” of any standard church but want to still be able to chat and learn.

The entire “campus” or area can be seen from a bird’s eye view, or by expanding or collapsing the screen. If you don’t want to move your avatar into an area, you can just tap on the screen and your avatar appears there.

More detail about each room / area:

4.1 Breaking of Bread

4.1.1.

This room would feature a series of videos of breaking of bread meetings being played. On the hour, every hour, a video of a different breaking of bread service is played. There would be $24 \times 7 = 168$ such videos. So that they cycle around. Ideally the order could be changed each week, so that e.g. if someone enters the room at the same time every week, there’s a different video playing. This could be achieved by playing through a YouTube play list, or we could arrange our own video streaming server. Most of those videos go for about 40 minutes. In the gap between the end of the video and the next video starting, there is the opportunity for discussion and comments of a public nature. Whilst the video is playing they can make comments as on a YouTube live stream or Facebook live broadcast.

4.1.2

The user enters the room, which is laid out like a large church with the video playing as it were on the stage / podium, and takes a seat. They can tap their “Amen” button to stand up and say “Amen” but not more often than once / minute. They can hover over others in the audience and engage in one to one chat with them if they wish. By hovering over a seated avatar, you can see who it is. There could be a visual indicator as to whether one of the audience is your “friend” or not. So if there are 100 avatars seated in the hall, you can then hover over those whose colour is [e.g.] green. You know they’re your friend, and you may want to send them a personal message, like “Lovely to see you here!”.

They can see others entering the room and taking a seat, and leaving the room. To avoid the possible distraction of this, they can just maximize the video or audio screen if they wish.

This scenario in 4.1.2 would be the same for the other rooms.

Here is a possible scene; the user can zoom in or out, so they are only seeing the video, or, they see the video and part of the audience; or, the whole audience and the video screen.



4.1.3

There would be perhaps a video of bread being broken and wine poured out and drunk, with prayers for the bread and wine, which would be played after the end of the video. This should be a different video each time, there would be $24 \times 7 = 168$ such videos. So that they cycle around. As with the video of the sermon.

There would also be videos of music. I'm not sure how many copyright free Christian music / videos we can assemble.

4.1.4

At the end of the meeting, in the gap waiting for the next video to come on, people can make comments by text or by microphone / audio. If by audio, then they will be queued as on the Christian chat app. But when it is their turn to use the microphone, their avatar stands up. OR there is a function on the avatar that can be tapped, to enable the seated avatar to stand up.

So the "service" would begin on the hour every hour:

- 1) Music video
- 2) Sermon
- 3) Prayers for bread and wine
- 4) Music video
- 5) Discussion / comments until the next "service" begins

Users can also invite their friends to a personal chat in one of the rooms in the gap between videos / services. They could sit at tables, or, just stand in the hall- just as one does after church finishes, i.e. after the service is over. Group size limited to 4 people in the chat. Users can invite people who aren't friends into their chat- just as in church, you may try to talk to people you don't know.



Users would have the ability to see that their friends engaged in chats, even if they're not part of the chat. If there are large numbers in the hall, they would only be able to see [say] the chats of four of their friends. If there are less than four people in the chat they observe taking place, they can go up to it and join it. So a scene after the service ends could be



Important thing is, that users intuitively see the possibilities. They don't have to read a lot of "How to use the app" stuff, but, the learning how to use it is intuitive and by observation of what's going on.

Whilst the audio or video is playing, those in the room can chat with other people but on a one-to-one private basis. Just as you might do in a church service, albeit by whispers! But after the service is over, then you can make a group of up to 4 people and chat in the hall.

It's good to have the ability to hover over avatars and see who they are. You may think "Wow, that's John Smith. Let me become friends with him". Or, you may see someone you've not seen for years- "Wow, that's Dave Smith there. I'll ask him how he's going".

4.2 Prayer

Users [registered users not visitors] can post a prayer request, and other users in the room can type out a prayer, or, speak a prayer by microphone or even video, using the chat function. Others present can tap their "Amen" button to stand up and say "Amen".

Visually, the user requesting prayer could ask "Who can pray with me?". They can invite friends who are online, or, anyone in the prayer room. They then go into a side room of the "Prayer" room and sit around a table, or kneel, and pray together. That is, the "prayer" time is held in a separate "room".

Every member can invite another friend to pray together. They then go together into the prayer room, like friends may play a game together on Roblox.

There could be a "wall of answered prayer" where people leave testimony [in writing] to how their prayers were answered. This would be text only.

There could be an option "Remind me to pray for [user name] every [hour / 09:00 / 18:00 every day]". A reminder would then be sent to the user who selects this, with the option to cancel or end the reminder.

4.3 Baptism

There would be a series of say 10 videos about baptism playing continually on the big screen. There would be an invitation to be baptized. And a link to information about the possibility of self baptism. Commentary and questions can be given in real time.

4.4 Bible Basics

There would be a series of say 40 videos about basic Bible doctrines playing continually on the big screen. There'd be encouragement to study the "Bible Basics" section of the existing app. Commentary and questions can be given in real time.

4.5 Christian Basics

There would be a series of say 260 short videos [about 5-6 minutes each] based on each chapter of the New Testament. Commentary and questions can be given in real time.

4.6 Missionary Training Program

There would be a series of about 24 x 1 hour videos playing continually in a seminar style room, one on the hour every hour. Commentary and questions can be given in real time.

4.7 Bible Study

A cycle of around 150 videos playing with 10 minutes space in between them for chatting. The schedule would be available [what videos playing when i.e. at what time GMT].

4.8 Bible Prophecy

A cycle of around 20 videos playing with 10 minutes space in between them for chatting. The schedule would not be available as this area will likely be changed often, with new videos commenting on current world events in the light of Bible prophecy

4.9 Chat with the pastoral team

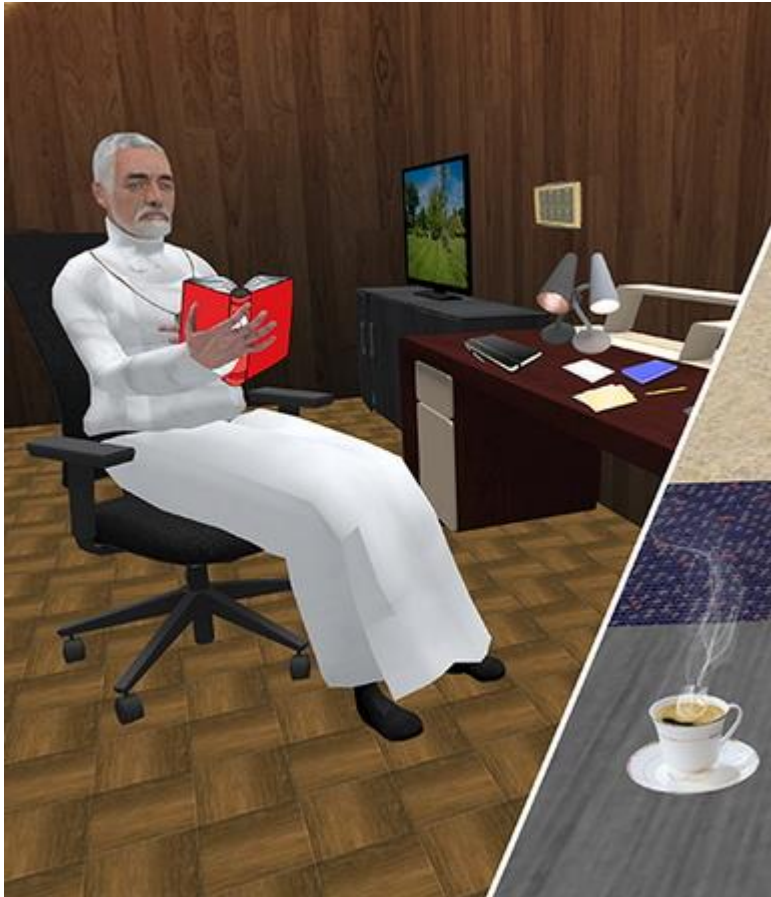
“Chat with the pastoral team” is advertised in all the rooms / areas. At any time, a user can send a message to the team.

This is just a separate room where a person can come and “meet” one of the pastoral team that’s available. The two avatars would draw up chairs and sit at a table. Maybe with tea / coffee etc.

If there is no response from the pastoral team after 1 minute, a waiter / waitress appears and apologizes for the delay, and asks if they want a drink- tea / coffee / water . And then returns to them with the drink after 30 seconds. This would be automated.

4.10 Daily Bible readings room

A picture of a person reading a Bible- not dressed as a priest, but something like:



There is no video, just the audio playing of the daily Bible readings for the day, according to the Bible Companion system- the reading system which is used on the current app. Commentary and questions can be given in real time.

4.11 Various tables and chairs within the building for chatting. Maximum of 7 people around each table. There is just one table in the app Virtual Father Church Manager

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.dumpgames.virtual.good.father&hl=en>

But there would be several of these, and also in the “Out of church” area outside the main building, but within the compound.

4.12 Personal Testimony

People can give a personal testimony in this room, using the chat function- either as audio, video or text. People in the room can comment or tap their “Amen” button.

4.13 Missionary work

This would be a play list of various Carelinks missionary work videos. Quite a long one. People can watch, and comment as they do. And as with all the rooms, have the opportunity to chat with the pastoral team.

4.14 Outside the church building, but within the compound, one or more areas / rooms labelled “Out of church Christians” and possibly one “Smoking area”. These would be areas for those who feel they are “out” of any standard church but want to still be able to chat and learn.

There would be a playlist playing of various videos- some Bible study, some basic doctrine, some missionary work videos. But there’d be the emphasis on chatting with each other. People can form groups of 4 people, either friends or not friends, and chat- at any time whilst the video is playing.

5

Interactions

On Roblox, you can invite a friend to play a game. On this app, you invite a friend to go to a meeting room. The symbol to the right hand side of the Roblox dialogue system, offering you a choice of games, becomes for us a choice of which meeting room to go to- e.g. to go to the breaking of bread room, or, the baptism room. You can “Unite to go to meeting”, and then one or both of you move your avatars to the room.

The primary way of interacting between friends and non friends is the chat function, and this will be the same here. With microphone / audio, and possibly video option. But to relieve pressure on our servers, especially if there is video and audio options, it would be good to somehow encourage the interactions to be away from our app. Each user lists the platforms they use- WhatsApp, Skype, Facebook Messenger etc. and they should somehow be encouraged to conduct their chatting by connecting with each other on whatever platform they have in common.

6

Music

Music can play as you enter the compound and navigate your way around, and when you leave one room and whilst you navigate to another room.

There could perhaps be a “Music” room or “Concert hall” where Christian music is played constantly. Daniel Aldersley is producing or obtaining a significant playlist of copyright free Christian music. There would be comments by text only; no ability to stand up and use the microphone whilst the music is playing.

7

Pastoral Team / Backend

There would need to be a page or website control panel for the pastoral team to use. The idea is that there would be a group of people, all registered members of the app, who would be [between them] available 24/7 for people to chat with. That would be a unique feature no other online church has, and I think we have enough willing helpers to make this happen.

We don’t know how popular this will be. There could be only 10 users in the church at a time. But there may well be over 1000. The ability for friends to start independent small group chats in the church hall after service therefore has to take account of this.

There should be some way of everyone seeing how many others are in the church at any time. It is comforting to know that e.g. there are 500 people at the same breaking of bread service that you're in.

So the Pastoral Team console should enable:

7.1.1 The team who are currently online to see messages flashing up as they come in. If one of the team "takes" the message and replies to it, the other team members see that it's been dealt with and go on to deal with another one

7.1.2 The opportunity to directly message members, and to instantly remove them

7.1.3 Perhaps to pause the playlist playing in a room; to close a room, or open a room. This is because if e.g. there are too many people crowded in a room, it would be better to open another room in order for there to be more places to go and have a smaller group size. The room could be just a mirror of one of the existing large rooms such as 4.1 [breaking of bread] or 4.7 [Bible study]

7.1.4 The opportunity to view the activity of a member in real time; to see what they are chatting to another person about; and to see all group conversations going on involving them. We would have to mention this in the "About / Conditions of use" section which people tick when they sign up. If they want to chat privately from us, then they should use WhatsApp, Messenger or whatever. *I am unsure about this feature- whether it's needed or whether it's not the right thing.*

7.1.5 Pastoral team members to act as ushers or waiters / waitresses if required. They can manually enter any conversation or "table" discussion and e.g. offer to bring drinks, or just remind them that the pastoral team are always here to answer questions. The drinks disappear from the table when a participant in the conversation leaves the room.

8

Live broadcast

8.1 The pastoral team, and any to whom they give access, would be able to give a live broadcast by video or audio [YouTube live stream?] into a room which appears in the compound, and which can be labelled by the broadcaster- e.g. "Carelinks Conference Live Now" or "Joe Bloggs explains Matthew chapter 1, live from Denver" or "Danny Aldersley singing songs for the lonely, live from NZ". This room could be a permanent feature of the church compound- called "Live broadcast", just it'd be 'dead' until there's a live broadcast. There would be the opportunity to add comments to the broadcast as there is on a YouTube live stream. People would enter the room and be seated as they do at 4.1 .

8.2

There would be a "live" church service every week, Sundays at 09:00 GMT. This would need to be 'advertised' to all app users on the Saturday evening as a reminder. This would be a video broadcast like a Facebook Live or YouTube live stream. Maybe YouTube live stream could be used for it. It may be that we add regular meetings like this, such as a Bible study on Wednesday evenings, a basic Bible teaching class on Tuesday mornings... or whatever.

9

Video / Audio

One issue is that many of our users are poorer folks with limited bandwidth where they live, and with limited internet usage. The stress on video would be difficult for them to cope with. Ideally we should have an option to listen to the audio of the video, and turn off the video. This would have to be synced- so that all users in a room are listening to the same thing at the same time, whether or not they are on audio or video. Perhaps the audio would have to be ripped from each video. The material at 4.13 is totally dependent upon video, so perhaps that wouldn't have this function. 4.13 would be video only.

10

Gamifying

This seems popular on apps these days. It has [to me] a strange attraction to many. You get points for e.g. how many times you open the app, how long you stay on it, how many times you attend a meeting. These points can then be redeemed through getting more distinctive clothing items for your avatar, or, to get a free hard copy Bible or book about the Bible like "Bible Basics".

Well I am not that smitten with this idea myself, but some have asked for it and like it. So, there you are.