# HOSTING ONLINE GROUPS:
# BRIEF TUTORIAL AND BEST

Virtual Groups may be new to many of you! In these days of quarantine, these virtual groups are a great way to help people stay connected. Despite the lack of face-to-face interaction, online groups are perfectly capable of allowing you to authentically share life, encourage one another, study together, and watch God work in ways you may not have dreamed possible.

Your first few meetings will take some adjusting as everyone gets acquainted with the technology and the online format and works out all of the kinks. So, don't give up too quickly if your first few meetings are a bit of a challenge. Remember to have fun and laugh! Take a few pictures if you can too!

This resource guide is designed to help you understand the best platforms, the best practices for a good online experience, and what a typical online group meeting may look like.

## AVAILABLE TECHNOLOGY PLATFORMS
*Note: This document includes interactive links can that be accessed by clicking on them.*

When it comes to online groups, we do not mandate any certain platform for connecting. Instead, we encourage groups to find a platform for connecting that works best – both from an ease-of-use standard and a sustainability standard – for your respective group.

**1. Zoom / Click to access Zoom**
**Pros:** Free. Only hosts are required to have a Zoom account. There is a phone-in option.
**Cons:** Meeting time is limited to 40 minutes unless you have a paid account ($14.99/month). Have to download the Zoom application to phone or computer.
**Capacity:** 100 participants/devices
**How to create an account with Zoom:**
- o Go to www.zoom.us
- o Click the blue "Sign up, it's free" button in upper right-hand corner.
- o Enter your email address. You will then be sent a link to your email.
- o Open the email and complete the sign-up process.

**How to use Zoom:**
- o Open Zoom in a web browser or mobile app (apple device, android device, chrome web browser extension)
- o Login
- o Click "Host a meeting with video on" in upper right-hand corner
- o Click "Invite participations"
- o Select how you'd like to send an invite:
  - ▪ Default Email, Gmail, Yahoo to send email invite, or "copy URL", "Copy Invitation" to copy a link and send it via a text message, email, Facebook message, etc.
- o You can also schedule a meeting on the zoom website and send an invite to join you at a specific time, including a link to your online meeting. (See Zoom Instructional Video)

**2. Google Hangouts / Click to access Google Hangouts**
**Pros:** Free. Unlimited time. Closed Captioning. Accessible via web browser on computer.
**Cons:** Requires a Google account for all participants. (Can sign up for one HERE). Phone-in option not available unless you have a business account.
**Capacity:** 25 participants/devices

**How to use Google Hangouts:**
- Open Google Hangouts in web browser or mobile app (apple device , android device, chrome web browser extension)
- Login
- Click "Video Call" button
- Click "Invite People" and type in their email address (If they don't have a Google account it will send them an invite to setup an account)
- You can also schedule a meeting on your Google calendar and send an invite to join you at a specific time, including a link to your online meeting. (See Instructions)

**Before you start your first video call with Google Hangouts:**
- Check the system requirements for Google Hangouts.
- If needed, connect a camera, microphone, and speakers to your computer. Make sure they have the latest software.
- When asked to use your computer's camera and microphone, click Allow.
- Download and install the latest version of the Hangouts plugin for Internet Explorer and Safari browsers.
- Important: You might need to turn on permissions for your camera and microphone in your computer's system settings.


# IMPORTANT NOTES REGARDING DEVICES AND TECHNOLOGY
- While mobile phones can be used, laptops and/or desktop computers are recommended are they offer a larger screen size.
- Only use one device per household. Multiple devices can cause audio feedback and other issues.
- Your device will ask for permission to access your audio and video. Approve all of this ahead of time.
- Place your device on a table or stable mount, not on your lap or in your hand. Having your hands free allows you to reference your Bible or additional study materials.
- Make sure your device is plugged in or at full battery level.
- Use landscape mode [sideways] instead of portrait [up and down].

# BEST PRACTICES FOR VIDEO CALLING / ONLINE ETIQUETTE

1. **Recommend that group members download any meeting software prior to meeting.**
   - See previous section on technology platforms available for online groups.

2. **Be aware of how you look on camera.**
   - Make sure your face has sufficient lighting. In general, lighting works best in front of your face, not behind. Brighter light is preferred to yellow/'warm' light.
   - Make sure your face is centered in the video camera. It's best to position the camera to eye level or slightly above.
   - Speaking tip: When talking, look directly into the camera. When not talking, look at the computer screen to watch others.

3. **Select the quietest room/location you can find.**
   - Turn off anything making noise in the background.
   - Put pets in a different room or have them in a place where they will be most quiet.
   - Have a plan for childcare (if possible) to minimize interruptions.

4. **Mute your computer unless you're the person talking.**
   - Whichever platform you're using, know how to turn off and on your mute button.  Teach your group members to do the same!
   - If you are muted, make sure to nod your head and listen well so people can recognize you are following them. Find creative ways to practice non-verbal communication.  Come up with some cool Group signs!

5. **Be both positive and assertive as a moderator/host.**
   - Your demeanor will set the stage for the attitude of everyone else in the group.
   - The moderator/host of the group will need to be welcoming and in charge. Make sure as host you jump on a few minutes early to welcome everyone.
   - Redirect the conversation or mute participants as necessary. This may feel rude, but it is sometimes necessary to manage a good online experience.
   - As a rule of thumb, the host should talk 20% of the time and listen 80% of the time.

6. **Create a plan for participants to indicate that they'd like to talk.**
   - You may try things like raising a hand, answering in a specific order, or another signal.
   - Since participants will often be muted, having a plan will help you know when to mute and unmute.  You may need to remind them to unmute.

7. **Encourage group participants to give their full attention (i.e. don't multitask).**
   - When participants are not giving their full attention, it can be as big a distraction with an online group as it can with an in-person group.

8. **Have a plan to stay in touch outside of your scheduled meeting time.**
   o Leverage resources and platforms like calling, texting, emailing, Facebook as a way to stay connected throughout the week.  Use what works best for your group, and make sure no one is left out (for example, not everyone is on Facebook).
   o Assign group members to follow up with one another and engage in prayer requests.

# ONLINE GROUP FORMAT / TYPICAL SCHEDULE

**Practice Session/First Meeting (30-45 minutes)**
   o It can be helpful to have a brief practice session together, to get everyone acquainted with how this virtual format will work.
   o Review the best practices/online etiquette (listed above). You may want to review these practices the first several meetings until they become more natural to people.
   o Help people learn how to use the technology and answer any questions.
   o End your group time by sharing prayer requests; and figure out the best way for your group to pray.

**Typical Meeting (60-90 minutes)**
1. **Moderator/Host welcomes everyone to the online group (5-10 minutes)**
   o Buffer time is important, as people tend to arrive late online (as with in-person groups).
   o Allow for people, if necessary, to adjust their lighting, camera, and microphone settings.
2. **Warm Up/Connection Time (10-20 minutes)**
   o The key here is to get everyone talking. This also allows the group members to get comfortable learning how to mute/unmute themselves when talking and listening.
   o Check out the virtual ice breakers resource as a way to start your group!
3. **Discussion Time (30-40 minutes)**
   o Read the Scripture passage, and discuss the Sermon questions that are provided.
   o Encourage everyone to share!
   o Listen well and ask great follow up questions. Let the conversation flow among your group members and redirect/keep-on-track as needed.
4. **Take Prayer Requests and Close in Prayer (15-20 minutes)**
   o Have a designated person to write down/record these prayer requests.
   o Have one person pray for the group, or assign prayer requests to different people.  Find the best prayer method that works best for your group!