HOW TO HOST AN ONLINE SMALL GROUP

New to hosting a small group online? An online group is an incredible tool to help people connect with each other when an in-person group may not be possible. You can encourage one another's faith, share authentically, 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 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.

As you look into launching a group online, or having your group try it out for a week, this page will help you figure out the technology to use, best practices for a good online experience, and what a typical group meeting might look like.

TECHNOLOGY

• Google Hangouts

- **Pros**: Free. Unlimited time. Closed Captioning. Accessible via web browser on computer.
- **Cons**: Requires a Google account for all participants. (Make sure participants sign up for a Google account.) Phone-in option not available unless you have a business account. (If you have a G Suite business account, you can also share a phone number for people to call into the meeting if they don't have access to a computer or smartphone.)
- **Capacity:** 25 Participants/Devices
- **How to Use**:
  - Open Google Hangouts in HERE or mobile app.
  - Log in.
  - Click "Video Call" button.
  - Click "Invite People" and type in their email addresses. (If they don't have a Google account, it will send them an invite to set up 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 HERE.
- Watch six-minute YouTube tutorial HERE.

• Zoom

- **Pros**: Free. Only hosts are required to have a Zoom account. There is a phone-in option.
- **Cons**: Limited to 40 minutes unless you have a paid account. Have to download Zoom application to phone or computer.
- **Capacity**: 100 Participants/Devices
- **How To Use**:
  - Open Zoom in a web browser or mobile app
  - Log in
  - Click "Host a meeting with video on"

- Click "Invite participants"
  - 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.
- 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 instructions HERE.
- Watch a tutorial video HERE.

• Facebook Messenger Groups

- **Pros**: Free. Accessible via web browser on computer. Can access without a Facebook account. (If you don't have a Facebook account, you'll need to download the app to your phone and use phone number.)
- **Cons**: Phone-in option not available.
- **Capacity:** 50 Participants/Devices: 6 video, 44 audio
- **How To Use**:
  - Open Facebook messenger on web browser or mobile app login (with Facebook account or phone number)
  - Click "New Message" button to add Facebook friends to group chat (see image below)
  - After adding contacts, click the "Video Call" button to start video chat (see image below)
- Watch video tutorial HERE.

• FreeConferenceCall.com

- **If your group is not as tech savvy or doesn't have the technology to do a video chat, this website offers a free conference call option to phone in. It will be a long-distance number most likely.**
- **How to Use:**
  - Sign up for an account HERE.
  - Share the dial-in number and access code with your group.

BEST PRACTICES/ONLINE ETIQUETTE

1. **Recommend group members to download meeting software prior to meeting.**
2. **Make sure your face has sufficient lighting.**
   - Lighting works best in front of your face, not behind.
3. **Make sure your face is centered in the video camera.**
   - We don't want to see your forehead, or neck, or miss you all together.
   - Position the camera to eye level or slightly above.
4. **Select the quietest room/location you can find.**
   - Turn off anything making noise in the background (TV, radio, appliances).
   - Put pets in a different room or have them in a place where they will be most quiet.
   - Places like a coffee shop or restaurant can work but sometimes background noise can be an issue. Noise canceling headphones can help with this.
5. **Only use one device per household.**
   - When two devices are used in one location it produces feedback (really annoying noises).
6. **Mute your computer unless you're talking.**
   - If everyone's microphone is turned on at the same time, the sound quality can be an issue and it can be hard to hear the person who is talking. So, the best policy is to mute yourself when you are not talking.

- If you are muted, make sure to nod your head and listen well so people can recognize you are following them.
- You will be muting and unmuting A LOT, so get used to it.
- Also, you'll get called out if you don't unmute, so don't be offended.
- Or maybe, the moderator will mute you, so don't take that personally."

7. **Be an assertive moderator.**
   - 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 is necessary to manage a good online experience.
   - The moderator should talk 20% of time and listen 80% of time.
8. **Create a plan for participants to indicate they'd like to talk.**
   - You may try something 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.
9. **Give full attention, don't multitask.**
   - When participants are not paying full attention, it can be a big distraction online just like an in-person group.
   - When talking, spend some time looking at the camera, not just the screen.
10. **Stay in touch afterwards.**
    - Assign prayer partners to call each other after after group is over and pray with them.
    - Or text each other in gender-specific text chats to share requests.
    - Leverage GroupMe, Facebook Groups, WhatsApp, etc. as a place to stay connected and keep the conversation going throughout the week.

FORMAT/SCHEDULE

- **Practice Session/First Meeting (30 minutes)**
  - It can be helpful to have a 30-minute practice session together or take the first half of your first online group get everyone acquainted with how an online group will work.
  - Review online etiquette/best practices (listed above). You may want to review some of these talking points the first several meetings until people figure it out.
  - Help people learn how to use the technology and answer any questions.
  - If you are a new group, make sure to introduce yourself, share you name, and share how you got connected with Victory and the online group.
  - End by sharing prayer requests; have one person pray.
- **Typical Meeting (45-60 minutes)**
  - **Connect – 15-20 minutes**
    - Welcome people as they log in (people tend to arrive late online, just like in-person groups).
    - Begin ice breaker (if needed).
  - **Discuss – 30-40 minutes**
    - Discussion on video/book content.
    - You can adjust the time if you're showing a video.
  - **Wrap Up – 5 minutes**
    - Ask for any prayer requests.
    - Have one person wrap up in prayer.
    - Encourage people to text each other afterward for further prayer requests and to pray together.

EMAIL INSTRUCTIONS TO YOUR SMALL GROUP MEMBERS

Hi all,

Tonight, we plan to meet online as a group for the first time. I wanted to email you some instructions so we are all prepared. Here are the details:

Day/Time: [Insert day/time here]

Technology: [Insert technology here] – look at the options listed

Because we are meeting online and we haven't done this before, it would be wise to test this out early to make sure you work out all of the kinks. I'll try to login by [time] to interact with any early birds.

You may need to download the [technology] on your computer or app on your smartphone. [Give instructions for how to download the technology here.]

Here are some best practices to help our discussion go well tonight:

1. **Make sure your face has sufficient lighting.**
    a. Lighting works best in front of your face, not behind.
2. **Make sure your face is centered in the video camera.**
    a. We don't want to see your forehead, or neck, or miss you all together.
    b. Position the camera to eye level or slightly above.
3. **Select the quietest room/location you can find.**
    a. Turn off anything making noise in the background (TV, radio, appliances).
    b. Put pets in a different room or have them in a place where they will be most quiet.
    c. Noise canceling headphones can be helpful if you have them. If not, no worries!
4. **Only use one device per household.**
    a. When two devices are used in one location it produces feedback (really annoying noises).
5. **Mute your computer unless you're talking.**
    a. If everyone's microphone is turned on at the same time, the sound quality can be an issue and it can be hard to hear the person who is talking. So, the best policy is to mute yourself when you are not talking.
    b. If you are muted, make sure to nod your head and listen well so people can recognize you are following them.
    c. You will be muting and unmuting A LOT, so get used to it.
    d. Also, you'll get called out if you don't unmute, so don't be offended.
    e. Or maybe, the Group Leader will mute you, so don't take that personally.
6. **Raise your hand or unmute when you are ready to talk.**
7. **Give full attention, don't multitask.**
    a. When we are not paying full attention, it can be a big distraction online just like in-person.
    b. When talking, spend some time looking at the camera, not just the screen.
8. **Stay in touch afterwards.**
    a. After our meeting, stay in touch with each other through texting or a phone call.

We can't wait to meet with you on [day] at [time]!

[Insert your name here]