LIFEgroups

HOW TO HOST YOUR GROUP ONLINE

When January 1, 2020, came, did you expect stores to be running out of toilet paper, your kids holding school at home, attending church in your pajamas, and wondering when you would see your group again? I don't think any of us could have predicted this situation, but we also know that we can't live in total isolation.

Now is the time that your group can step up in a unique way to keep the gift of community and care moving forward.

Now is the time for us all to become techies who keep the gospel alive.

An online group gathering is a way to help your group connect when we can't gather in person. Using the following online tools, we can still practice encouragement, discipleship, prayer, authenticity, and observing God moving in the lives of others.

Your first time together will take some adjustment since everyone will have to learn technology and how to meet online. You will have kinks in the system, but don't let that scare you and don't give up too quickly if this is a challenge.

Since we won't be able to meet in person, let me encourage you to go online for the near future. This packet will help you figure out technology options, and give you some best practices for an excellent video venue.

We have also put together what a typical online group gathering might look like for you (see page 6 of this packet).

One last thought, I met with seven people from our Adult Ministry team this morning online. Some of us threw on a hat to cover the bed head, our makeup wasn't in place yet, other people were in the background at times, and others were starting with their first cup of coffee. By the end of our online gathering, we were laughing together. We were authentic with one another because we were revealing who we are behind closed doors. We prayed together, peeking every once in a while to see who would pray next. In the end, we enjoyed one another amid social distancing. It was fun! You can do this as well, and I look forward to hearing the stories.

HAVE QUESTIONS? Contact us here. We'd love to help!
Contact Phil Shields, pshields@wheatonbible.org

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 ($14.99 per month). **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** (**apple device**, **android device** or **chrome web browser extension**)
- Login
- 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**.)
- Watch **tutorial videos** in Zoom video library.

GOOGLE HANGOUTS

- **PROS** Free. Unlimited time. Closed Captioning. Accessible via web browser on computer.
- **CONS Requires a Google account for all participants.** (Sign up for one **here**). **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. GSuite accounts are free till July 1.)
- **CAPACITY 25 participants/devices**

HOW TO USE

- Open Google Hangouts in **web browser** or mobile app (**apple device**, **android device** or **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)
- Watch 6 minute **YouTube tutorial.**

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 your 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 1 below)*.
- After adding contacts *(see image 2 below),* click the "Video Call" button to start video chat *(see image 3 below)*.
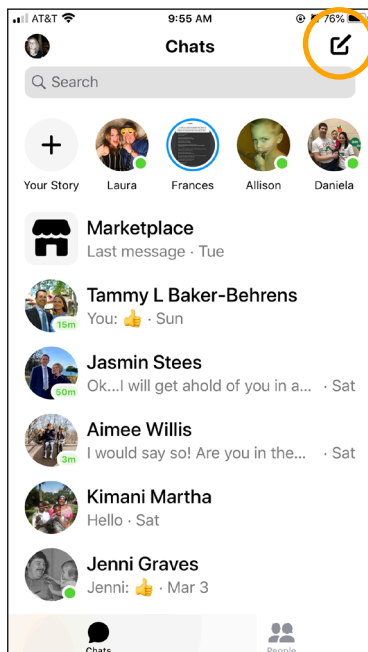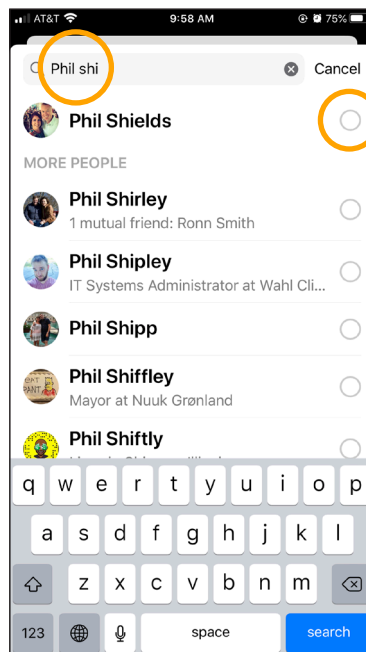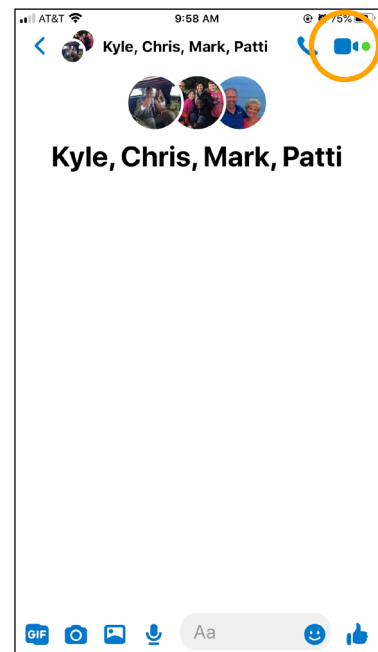- **Watch 2-minute tutorial.**

Image 1

Image 2

Image 3

BEST PRACTICES/ONLINE ETIQUETTE

1. **Recommend to everyone in your group to download the application you will use prior to your gathering time.**

2. **Make sure your face has sufficient lighting.**
    - Lighting works best in front of your face, not behind.
    - Use a window behind the camera or a lamp.

3. **Make sure your face is centered in the video camera or hold the camera as steady as possible.**
    - People won't want to see your forehead, or neck, or your feet.
    - 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.
    - Put a movie on for the kids in another room but know they might interrupt at times and that's ok.

5. **Only use one device per household.**
    - When two devices are used in one location it produces feedback with 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. The best practice is to mute yourself when you are not talking. (Zoom will allow the host to mute and unmute everyone.)
    - 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. Choose laughter.

7. **Be an assertive leader.**
    - The leader/host of the group will need to be welcoming and in charge. Make sure as the online 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.
    - Remember that as a good leader you should talk 20% of the time and listen 80% of the 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.
   - Don't allow technology to lead you to other places while you're on with your group.

10. **Stay in touch afterwards.**
    - You could assign prayer partners to call each other after your gathering is over and pray together.
    - Text each other in gender specific text chats to share requests.
    - Utilize a text thread with the entire group to stay in communication while feeling isolated in your home.

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PRE-GATHERING

- Encourage everyone to play with the online application you will use if they aren't used to it.
- Send the best practices list to everyone.
- Help people learn how to use the technology to the best of your ability and answer any questions.
- Remind people that this won't always be smooth and that's ok.

TYPICAL GROUP GATHERING (45–60 minutes)

CONNECT (15–20 minutes)

- Welcome people as they login (people tend to arrive late online, just like in-person groups).
- Begin with an ice breaker question.
  - This is important because living in isolation people will need some levity to reconnect. Make it fun!

DISCUSSION (30–35 minutes)

- Discuss whatever guide you are using, leaving plenty of time for application questions.
- Change the application questions to fit the relevancy of now.

WRAP UP (5 minutes)

- Ask for any prayer requests.
- Have 1 person wrap up in prayer.
- Encourage people to stay connected afterwards through text or phone calls.
  - Pair up with someone else from the group to pray every couple of days together.