



LIFE GROUPS Online

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to prayer,
to the breaking of bread and to fellowship.” Acts 2:42

Are you new to hosting a group online? Don’t let the idea scare you! Lots has changed in the past few weeks! But one thing hasn’t changed: Jesus’ call into community with a few others, to practice apprenticeship to Jesus. Though we are restricted in the kind of face-to-face contact we have, our identity remains the same: FAMILY, APPRENTICES, and MISSIONARIES. It takes some extra creativity, but community is never meant to go “offline,” out of commission. So, besides the good old fashioned phone, or a conversation from door to lawn, what tools are available to us for nurturing connection in a time of social distancing? Thankfully, in this day and age, there are many great online tools for meeting together! Some of the tools even allow for people who aren’t internet-equipped to phone in.

Granted, there may be a few awkward moments as everyone gets used to the format and the technology. Be patient with yourself and with others, and don’t give up if the first couple of times are challenging. These pages are designed to help you overcome any hurdles and have the best group experience you can have online! (With thanks to NorthRidgeLeaders.com)

If you have questions, please don’t hesitate to contact us!

TECHNOLOGY

- **GOOGLE HANGOUTS**

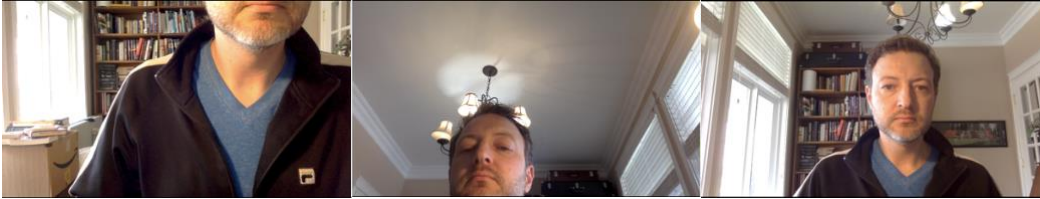
- **Pros: Free. Unlimited time. Closed Captioning. Accessible via web browser on computer.**
- **Cons: Requires a google account for all participants.** (can sign up for one [HERE](#)). **Phone-in option not available unless you have a business account.** (If you have a **G Suite business account**, 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, 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](#))
 - [Watch 6 minute youtube tutorial.](#)
- **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/mo). 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 \(apple device, android device, chrome web browser extension\)](#)
 - Login
 - Click “Host a meeting with video on”
 - Click “Invite participations”
 - 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.](#)
 - Some users of Zoom are experiencing Zoom “trolls,” uninvited people joining meetings and then sharing obscene or disruptive content on their screens. Watch [this brief video](#) to learn how to guard your meetings against this possibility. One easy way to do this is to only share your meeting link directly and privately with your group, not in public online environments.
- **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 2 minute tutorial.](#)
- [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.



NO

NO

YES

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 room.**
 - When two devices are used in one location it produces feedback (really annoying noises).
 - If two members of the same household want to participate individually, they need to be in separate rooms, out of earshot of the other.
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 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 Northridge and the online group.
 - End by sharing prayer requests; have 1 person pray.
- **Typical Meeting (45-60 minutes)**
 - **Connect - 15-20 minutes**
 - Welcome people as they login (people tend to arrive late online, just like in-person groups).
 - Let people know the timeline and basic agenda you're aiming for, for example, "I'm planning on us going until about 9:00. I'd like to give us time to check in, to read and discuss a little from the Scriptures, and to pray for each other."
 - Begin with ice breaker or check-in questions.
 - It usually works best if you say, "Bill, would you be the first to answer?" rather than just opening it up. If you do open it up, and people are a little bit hesitant to speak (it can be embarrassing to speak at the same time as someone else), just gently call on someone.
 - **Read/Watch/Discuss - 30-40 minutes**
 - If you are using **sermon discussion questions**, proceed with the study. Remember, in general people's attention span is a little shorter in an online format.
 - If you are using Right Now Media, make sure the video is cued up before your meeting. At the appropriate time, share your screen and play the video. When the video is finished, lead the group in discussion.
 - If you are just opening up a Scripture (perhaps from Life Journaling), read portions of the Scripture, pausing to give people time to respond.
 - Aim to finish the discussion with application questions.
 - **Wrap Up - 10-20 minutes**
 - Ask for any prayer requests. How you pray together depends on your group:

- You could have one person pray for each individual request as it is shared.
- After collecting the requests, ask 2-3 people to pray for the requests on behalf of the whole group.
- If your group is fairly large (more than 10), you may choose to create breakout rooms in order to facilitate more personal prayer.
- After all requests have been spoken in prayer, ask 1 person to wrap up in prayer.
- Encourage people to text each other afterwards for further prayer requests and to pray together. (Prayer Ideas: men's group text, women's group text, whole group text, prayer partners.)