

Life Groups: Digital Meetings

As we move to online gatherings for groups, whether they are big or small, here are some options and recommended behaviours.

Please note we are recommending video conferencing/calls. This creates a sense of face-to-face interaction and creates a greater sense of connection, particularly with a group.

Obviously during the week, keep up your text groups for general updates, like prayer and praise points, and resource sharing.

PLATFORM OPTIONS

Messenger / WhatsApp: many groups already have one of these platforms and could be a simple way to connect easily and quickly, without any extra set-up. There are significant limits though - WhatsApp allows a *max of 4 users on a video call*, while Messenger has a *max of 8 users per video call*. Neither has a time-limit though, so it's great if you have a small group. Encourage couples or people in the same house to jump on the same device and

FaceTime: similar to the above, really easy to use, but the main issue it is only available on Apple products. So, if everyone in your group has an iPhone, iPad, or Mac, this is a really easy way to connect as there is no extra things to download and no major limits of time or people (I believe the max is 32).

Skype: this is available on all devices and has a max limit of 50 people, so will work for everyone. It is free to use and sign-up, though each person will need to download the app and register. But it is reliable, user-friendly, and has all the features you need to have a great meeting.

Zoom: this seems to have become really popular amongst churches in the rush to digitalise everything. You can have hundreds of people on a video call, there are some cool features like breaking into smaller groups and things like that. However, you will most likely need to pay for an account – as the free account has a 40-minute time-limit on group calls. It is very user-friendly though and is something we can explore for your group if interested. There is set-up involved with each person downloading the app and the host registering and sending out the link. We will likely use this as a church for larger gatherings, like youth group.

Webex: an alternative to Zoom is Webex. The free account no longer has any time limits, so you can meet with your whole group. There is a set-up involved, similar to Zoom, but just doesn't have some of the extra features that Zoom has, at least, not as easily. If you're wanting to just video call with a group of more than 10, it is a great option.

Google Hangouts: a final alternative that works decently well if you already have a Google account or email. There is a max of 10 users on a call with your personal account but works relatively easily.

What I would recommend:

- Start with a platform you know and are comfortable with.
- If you're unsure, find someone in your group to be the tech-operator. If they experience or account with Zoom or Google Hangouts or anything, go with that.
- If everyone in your group is on Messenger or WhatsApp or FaceTime and you are below the user-limit for those, then go with that.
- If it is all new and you're just wanting to get a video chat started, Skype would be easiest and is available across all devices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- If possible, get people to **connect via a laptop or tablet**, rather than their phone. A phone is great in smaller groups, but with most platforms, it will limit the number of faces you can see. It is always beneficial to see as many people as you can.
- **Get prepared early** as it is bound to be a struggle to get started. So send out the link, get everyone to download the app (if needed) and be ready to go at your start time.
- **Starting is a struggle** as everyone connects in and the quality will fluctuate during this time. Be patient, and wait for it to settle and it should be fine once you get going.
- Have your **camera on** as a default, so you can see each person and read any cues.
- Having your **mic on mute** as a default option is good, particularly if there is background noise in your room. Allow whoever is speaking to communicate clearly and then simply **unmute** when you wish you respond. As a group, you may even choose to implement a little **hands-up** action if you want to say something, just to make it easier.
- It will all feel a bit **un-natural and awkward** and while this is not our ideal, it is what we've got at the moment. Especially at the start, it can be hard to 'break the ice', so realise you'll probably have to change the way you talk and discuss as a group.
- If you're **leading the discussion**, be clear and direct with your questions. Give people a chance to respond and think. Maybe ask specific people to answer, if you've got some quieter people.