

# LEADING A VIRTUAL GROWTH GROUP

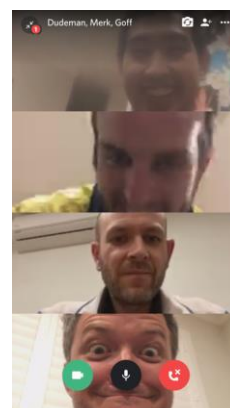
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The COVID-19 pandemic means that meeting physically as a Growth Group is now difficult or impossible. However, we still love and care for our fellow group members. We resonate with Paul, when he says to the Thessalonians:

*“...we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored all the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face” (1 Thess 2:17).*

Even though we can't be in the same room, we still want to see people grow to be more like Jesus, love and care for each other, pray together and encourage each other in their walk with God.

So how can we do this in an online space? These training notes are designed to help you set up and lead a virtual group. I'm sure they will need updating soon, but I hope they do for now.



## PRELIMINARY COMMUNICATION

Something to do early on is make sure you know **who is in your group** and their contact details: mobile phone, email, facebook name etc.

Make sure you have a **simple means of communicating** as a whole group such as WhatsApp ([intro video here](#)) or Facebook Group Chat. This will be useful before, during, and after your virtual meeting.

I've written a blog post today that you could share with your group members: "[9 Ways to Love Your Online Group](#)".

## CHOOSE A PLATFORM

There are several platforms you can use. We'll become more familiar with them over time. Most will have online written or video tutorials to help you use them and you should also learn by playing around with their features.

- **Zoom.** This is a popular and easy to use platform for meeting as a virtual group. It also allows for the group to split into "breakout rooms" during the study. You will need to purchase a subscription (\$21 per month) to have an uninterrupted meeting. Your group members might help you with the cost. It will work better if your group members download the app if they're using a phone or tablet. Here's a [long but thorough video](#) on how to use it. Find other [video tutorials here](#).
- **Google Hangouts Meet.** This is a free Google tool. Your group members will need a Google account. Here's a [video on how to use it](#). See another [video introduction here](#).
- **Discord.** This will be familiar to gamers. It's free. [Video tutorial here](#).
- **Others?** There will always be others. Search YouTube for "how to" videos on any of these other platforms.

## PREPARE YOUR GROUP

- Encourage people to **set up their technology**: computers, tablets, phones, microphones, cameras, chargers, mini-tripods etc. Be aware there could be shortages in the shops now for some items. Experiment with what you've got and practice. It's worth getting good audio and video.

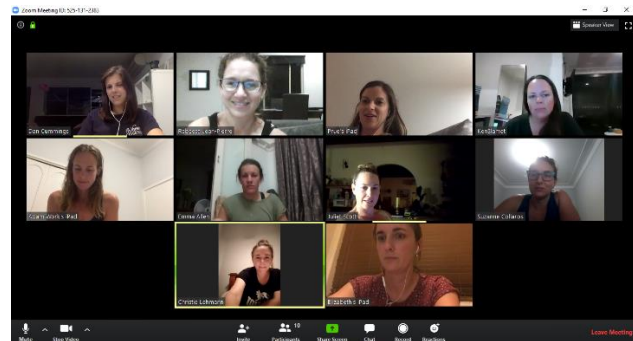


- **Headsets** can help if background noise such as pets and children are likely. They can also help if you'd rather your household didn't listen in to what your group members are saying.
- Encourage people to think about **space and lighting**. Group members will love to see each other during the meeting, so it's worth making it easier for them.
- **Internet** needs to be ok. Zoom, for example, recommends a bandwidth of 1.5 Mbps. Check your internet bandwidth now with [Speedtest](#).
- **Set an example** by dressing for the event like you would for a regular group. It's also worth doing whatever "grooming" might be appropriate (comb hair, blokes have a shave, etc). This helps communicate the importance of the event.
- Get your group to **look at the Bible passage and some of the study in advance**. Virtual group will take a while to get used to, so if people can be further along in preparation you'll have more to work with for discussion.

## STARTING THE MEETING

The beginning of your virtual Growth Group event is really important. People will initially feel nervous. Make sure you're **ready in advance** and able to welcome people as they join and help them get their video and audio working.

**Introduce people** and let them know who has joined and who you're waiting on. Set the tone of warmth and friendliness.



Have the group chat (e.g Whatsapp) going on simultaneously so people can still communicate if they're having technical problems.

## LEADING THE MEETING

Leading a virtual Growth Group will take a while to get used to but the principles are still the same as for a physical meet up:

- Plan and prepare like you would usually
- Create a warm and friendly atmosphere
- Get everyone talking at some point
- Encourage everyone to listen well

Here are some tips:

- People might feel a bit invisible until we get used to a virtual group and so will be slow to speak up. Encourage them to jump in and speak into the group.
- You can also help participation by directing questions to people more than you would in a physical group. E.g. "Tony, what were your thoughts about question 1?" You could warn people that you might be a bit more directive until we get used to things.
- Keep in your head a virtual "circle" of group members so you can move around the circle to involve people.
- Try to look into your camera when you speak rather than the screen. This can help promote a connection with your listeners.
- Remember that people are looking at you, so keep paying attention, nodding, smiling etc.

- Give your co-leaders plenty of opportunities to speak into the discussion.
- Keep to a plan so you have time for prayer.
- Think about how you can be fun and creative. For example, one week everyone dresses formally, or shows an object from their house, or shares a funny video. Could you try singing in group in some way?

As you get better with the technology you might be able to make use of features such as Zoom’s “breakout rooms” to have discussion and prayer in smaller groups. See [video tutorial here](#).

## ENDING THE MEETING

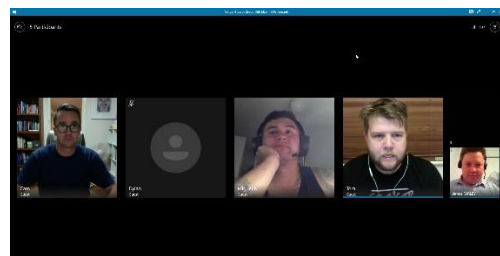
Most of us aren’t used to ending a virtual meeting so you should give guidance here too. Signal to people when the formal group time is over and **invite them to stay online** and chat like you normally would.

When people need to leave **make sure they say goodbye** and everyone else says goodbye. Think about when you’ll next be in touch. E.g. “I’ll call you on Wednesday” or “See you at the guy’s mini-chat on Thursday night”.

**Invite people to communicate** further prayer points, questions and updates on your other communication platform.

## IMPROVING

There’s a good chance there will be a few issues as you learn how to lead a virtual group. Don’t be discouraged! This is a **time to learn more** and grow in new skills. Make use of the skills of your group members to improve as much as you can about the group experience.



God is good and he can keep using you as a leader to help people grow and love each other in Christian community, especially in response to our prayers. This period of meeting as a virtual group could be a great blessing to you and your members.

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