



Mutually Encouraged in Our Shared Faith

ROMANS 1:11-17

I long to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift so that you may be strengthened—or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

Romans 1:11-12

Gather

CHECK IN

Name someone who often encourages you. How do they encourage you—through their words, actions, or something else?

OPENING PRAYER

Good and gracious God, we have come to know you through the witness of many people. We thank you for those who have moved us toward faith, and pray that we in turn might encourage others toward faith. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

COMMUNITY-BUILDING

Think about groups or communities you have participated in. Tell about one of these groups. (This might be a church group, but it could also be a team, a group of friends, or a club in which people gave and received encouragement.) How did members of this group mutually encourage and build up one another?

Turn to the group covenant on page 9. How do the guidelines set up your Bible conversations to be times of mutual encouragement in faith? Is there anything you would like to add to the group covenant?



Dwell

DWELLING IN THE WORD

The apostle Paul believed deeply that he was called to announce the gospel to those who were not Jewish. He is the author of Romans, a letter written to believers in Christ in the capital city of the Roman Empire (see map on page 21), the biggest political power of his day.

As you listen to this portion of Paul's letter, pay attention to clues about what matters to Paul and what kind of relationship he has with those receiving the letter. (If you have heard this passage before, listen as if you are hearing it for the first time.) Notice what speaks to you from God's living word *right now*.

Romans 1:11-17

¹¹For I long to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift so that you may be strengthened— ¹²or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. ¹³I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you, as I have among the rest of the gentiles. ¹⁴I am obligated both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish, ¹⁵hence my eagerness to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is God's saving power for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith, as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith."

CONVERSATION

1. Understanding the one who wrote this letter will help us better understand the letter itself. Sometimes people treat the words of the Bible as though they are abstract ideas, above time and place, but this is a message rooted in a particular person's experience. Paul makes himself ("I") the subject of the sentence a dozen times in today's scripture text.
 - ♦ What words or images stood out to you as the text was read?
 - ♦ What does this text tell you about Paul? What seems to matter most to him?
 - ♦ What words would you use to describe Paul's relationship with the people he writes to in Rome?



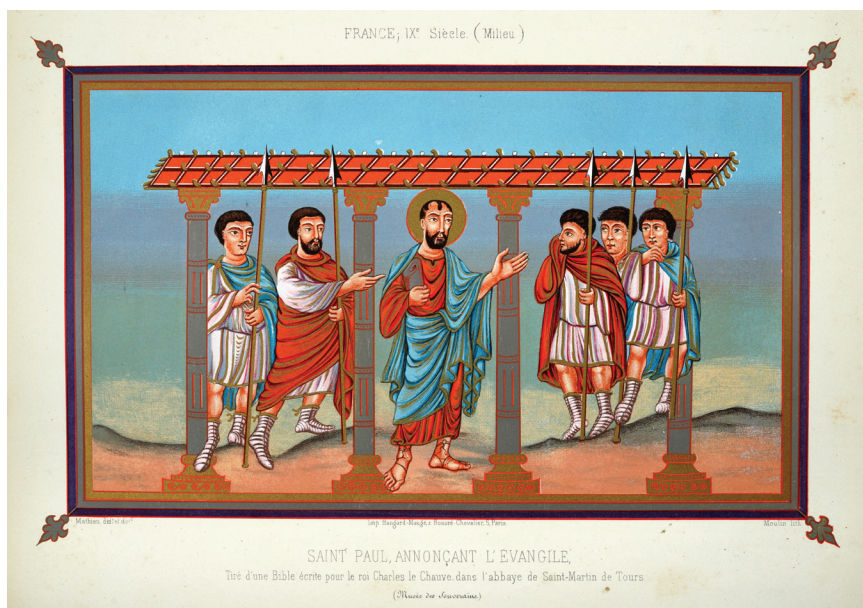
"Medallion with Saint Paul from an Icon Frame," Constantinople, ca. 1100.

2. Paul writes in Romans about wanting to share spiritual gifts or mutually encourage each other in the faith. In general, spiritual gifts are strengths we have that bring us closer to God and each other.
 - ♦ Make a list of spiritual gifts you have witnessed in people of faith. After you have your list, you could look at 1 Corinthians 12:7-10, where Paul lists some gifts of the Spirit. Allow his list to expand your own.
 - ♦ What has the sharing of spiritual gifts or mutual encouragement in the faith looked like in communities you have known? (You may include examples from within and outside of the church.)

3. Paul uses the word *gospel* or *good news* in this letter. The word in the Greek language refers to an oral declaration of some great event that has taken place. Think about a town crier shouting, “Hear ye, hear ye!” followed by an official word sent by a king. Since the one who authorizes this announcement is Jesus, the content is very different from kingly proclamations.

- ♦ As you hear Paul talk about the gospel, what comes to your mind? (Notice what Paul says about the gospel in verse 16.)

- ♦ How would you sum up what the good news means to Paul?



The apostle Paul announcing the gospel, 9th century.

4. Another key word in today's scripture text is *faith*. Lutherans have understood believing and faith in Jesus as primarily about trust, not doctrinal claims. Jesus makes promises and we trust that he can and will follow through on those promises. Read verses 16 and 17 aloud again, exchanging “trust(s)” for “believes” and “faith.” (An NRSVue footnote related to “believes” in verse 16 shows that “trusts” is a legitimate translation.)
- ♦ What thoughts, images, or emotions does this reading of verses 16 and 17 stir in you?

Engage

WORD AND SERVICE

As I go into the next week, one thing I have heard or learned today that I dare not forget is _____.

Consider who you might invite to come to a Together by Grace session with you.

In response to the good news, think about how your group might work together to serve or share the gospel in the congregation or larger community in the weeks ahead.

WORSHIP AND PRAYER

Write down a prayer concern that you have today, keeping any individuals anonymous.

God of the good news, in Jesus you have come to us that our faith—our trust—in you might be strengthened. In this community we have shared what this means to us. Help our lives to be grounded in your good news. In Jesus' name, Amen.

SESSION RECAP

Today we have heard the word of good news that a particular man, Paul, shared with a specific community that he loved. The gospel is not safely tucked away from humanity in heaven, but takes on flesh in the midst of our relationships with others whom God loves. The good news offers to its hearers deep reasons to trust in God and walk in faithfulness. Paul's good news re-created the community in Rome, helping them to mutually strengthen each other in their witness to Jesus. So also our own walks of faith are marked indelibly by those who have cared for us and allowed us to care for them.

SUGGESTIONS FOR GOING DEEPER

- ✦ Send a text, email, or letter to someone in need of encouragement. You might include a quote from the Bible, a photo, or something else the recipient will appreciate.
- ✦ Pray for your Together by Grace group during the week.
- ✦ Learn more about Paul, his letters, and his travels. (Here is a good place to start: enterthebible.org.)
- ✦ Read more of Paul's writings. Feel free to pick and choose from this list or read one passage a day.
 - ♦ Romans 1:1-6
 - ♦ Romans 1:7-8
 - ♦ Romans 2:1
 - ♦ Romans 2:3-4
 - ♦ 1 Corinthians 12:7-10
 - ♦ Romans 2:11
 - ♦ Romans 2:28-29
- ✦ Take a few moments to think and wonder about what you experienced in this session. Here are a few prompts you might use in this reflection or journaling time.
 - ♦ What does it mean to you to not be ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ?
- ♦ Think more deeply about a person who encourages you. Note how their way of life has helped you grasp the wisdom they've shared with you. Has their character rubbed off on you? If so, how?



When Paul (Saul) was threatened, friends helped him escape from Damascus in a basket lowered over the city wall (Acts 9:19-25).

- ♦ What are some of your spiritual gifts? Which gift do you use most often, and why?

LOOKING AHEAD

In the next session we will explore the source and nature of the righteousness God gives us through faith.



THE ROMAN EMPIRE

