



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

Quick prep

We will explore the trusting relationship that Paul had with the audience he addressed in Rome. The gospel is not locked away in heaven, safely isolated from the complexity of human life; it takes on flesh amid real relationships among those whom God gathers. The gospel roots the community in faith and calls upon them to live together faithfully. The good news of Jesus builds a community whose members mutually strengthen each other. Our journey into Romans begins with the hope that our attention to God's word will help us mutually strengthen each other as well.

SUPPLIES

- ♦ Small slips of paper
- ♦ A small bowl
- ♦ Copies of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (ELW)

Gather (15 to 30 minutes)

CHECK IN

Invite each person to introduce themselves and speak to the check-in question in the participant guide. Keep track mentally of the elements that led to encouragement in their examples. You can recall those in the community-building section of the study.

- ✦ Greet and introduce yourself to participants as they arrive. Begin learning the names of those you don't know.
- ✦ Be the first to introduce yourself so you can demonstrate the appropriate length of sharing.
- ✦ If you have a hybrid group (some participants meeting in person and one or more joining online), make sure those online are included throughout the session. You might invite them to introduce themselves after your own introduction.

- ✦ Ask for a volunteer to pray the opening prayer aloud, or set the tone by pausing for a few moments and then praying this prayer yourself.

- ✦ Ask for someone to volunteer to be the first person to share about an encouraging community. When that person is done sharing, ask who would like to be next. People who are a bit reluctant to speak will appreciate not being put on the spot.

- ✦ Note the importance for the group to allow people to share their thoughts without judgment and to keep personal information confidential.

- ✦ Dwelling in the word is at the heart of each session. Don't rush it. Set the pace by reading the text yourself today, followed by 10 seconds of silence for reflection.
- ✦ Tell the participants to trust that God will speak something new to them through this living word from scripture. Begin with the new insights they hear, rather than anything they recall from previous studies.

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

In this section, you are laying groundwork for the way conversations will take place during the eight sessions of this study. The questions in the participant guide serve several purposes that you should keep in mind. First, they allow participants to get to know each other and their values. Second, these questions invite reflection on the similarities between Paul and his audience and the caring relationships participants have known and appreciated. Finally, the questions prompt participants to articulate the values they will use in mutually encouraging each other during this extended study of Romans.

After everyone has shared responses about an encouraging community, invite them to suggest guidelines that will help your time throughout this study lead to mutual encouragement in the faith. Suggest that the previously discussed communities of mutual encouragement might inform their ideas. Point to the group covenant (page 9 in the participant guide) and ask the group for any guidelines they want to add.

Dwell (20 to 40 minutes)

DWELLING IN THE WORD

Read today's scripture text aloud slowly. Encourage participants to notice which of Paul's words stand out to them. Some may wish to underline such words as they listen to the passage being read; others should feel free to close their eyes and identify words and images that stayed with them as the scripture reading came to an end.

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. Invite participants to share their initial thoughts about Paul and his audience. There are no wrong answers here, but these observations will have an impact throughout all eight sessions of this study.
2. Formulate an understanding of spiritual gifts together. For Paul such gifts always build up the community. Start a list of items that might be considered spiritual gifts. If participants would like to see one way Paul identifies spiritual gifts, you could look together at 1 Corinthians 12:7-10.
3. Ask participants to go through today's scripture text and circle all the times Paul uses the words *gospel* or *good news*. What themes run through these references? What new dimensions to these words arise in each repetition?
4. After verses 16 and 17 are read aloud, exchanging "trust(s)" for "believes" and "faith," encourage participants to share their responses to this reading.

- ✦ Write down the group's observations on a whiteboard with an in-person group, in the chat feature with an online group, or both for a hybrid group (recruit someone to type in the chat what you write on the board).
- ✦ Welcome and affirm all responses. Be sure to encourage people new to Bible study to give their reactions to hearing the text.
- ✦ Whenever possible, ask participants to be specific about where in the text they hear evidence for their responses. This conversation should be grounded in the scripture text.
- ✦ Some people come from a background that assumes one right answer to every question. Create a space where they can appreciate different angles on a theme under discussion.

Engage (10 to 20 minutes)

WORD AND SERVICE

Challenge participants to share their unforgettable thing with someone who wasn't present and invite that person to the next session.

Encourage the group to consider a ministry collaboration they could do in the weeks ahead.

- ✦ A ministry collaboration can provide wonderful opportunities for participants to serve others as they share their gifts and mutually encourage one another in faith.

WORSHIP AND PRAYER

Distribute slips of paper and invite participants to each write down a prayer request. For this session, keep the names of those prayed for anonymous; in future sessions, names can be provided if the person(s) involved give permission.

Put the prayer requests in a bowl, mix them up, and have people draw a slip from the bowl. Have each person read the prayer request they chose.

Pray the closing prayer aloud together:

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.

- ✦ For an online or hybrid group, gather prayer concerns in the chat feature, then ask for a volunteer to read these concerns aloud.

Invite the group to sing or read aloud “What a fellowship, what a joy divine” (ELW 774).

- ✦ Point out “Suggestions for Going Deeper,” which provide options for personal reflection and learning in the week ahead.

LOOKING AHEAD

Make any necessary announcements about the time, place, and so on for the next session. Thank everyone for coming and participating in today’s discussion.

