

## Transcript

### 267-The real reason to go to church with Tom Wadsworth

00:00:01 - James Early

Hey there and welcome again to the Bible Speaks to you podcast. So great to have you here listening today. I've got a wonderful guest. I know you're going to enjoy him. It's Tom Wadsworth. Tom, welcome to the Bible Speaks to you.

00:00:14 - Tom Wadsworth

Thank you, James. It's great to talk to you.

00:00:16 - James Early

And we're going to be talking today about a really interesting topic and something that's really close to my heart is early Christianity and how the church gathered and met, what they did when they came together. We have turned that into a worship service today and Tom has some really fresh perspectives on learning how the early church met and communicated and talked and operated when they got together. So that's kind of what we're talking about today and we're going to talk about the real reason to go to church in the first place. I want to tell you a little bit about Tom and why I think he can really share some great ideas with you. Tom holds two master's degrees in biblical studies and he has a Ph.D. in New Testament studies. His 2022 doctoral dissertation focused on first century Christian assemblies. It really was challenging this notion that worship is the purpose of the Christian assembly, what we have ended up calling church. His recent videos on YouTube of some of these ideas in the early Christian meetings have been viewed more than 300,000 times. So I'll have a link to those videos in the show notes. You should check them out. He's got some really cool ideas. People have said about these videos. They're absolutely groundbreaking. They're very eye opening. They certainly gave me some new fresh ideas to think about and sort of built on some things I questions I already had. Somebody else said it's been a profound reorientation of our thinking and the national treasure. But not everyone necessarily agrees with him. And so we may get into that a little bit as we go. Tom lives in Illinois with his wife. He has three grown children and eight grandkids.

00:02:17 - Tom Wadsworth

Right, right.

00:02:18 - James Early

Got a full house of family. That's pretty cool. Tom, is there anything else we need to know about you?

00:02:25 - Tom Wadsworth

You know. No. Well, there is, you know, one question that always pops up when we talk about the early church. People want to know where are you coming from, what church do you go to, what's your background and all that. So let's just in interest of full disclosure, just say what that is. I was born and raised Lutheran. When I was 18, I had a born again experience with the Churches of Christ. This is the non instrumental group. I was a minister for the Churches of Christ up until 1985, when I got out of the ministry and spent about 30 years or so in the corporate world, but constantly. Also continuing my studies, I have attended Methodist churches,

Presbyterian churches, evangelical churches, currently at a Methodist church. Although I am not defending or attacking any of the above or anybody else, my point of my dissertation was simply to get back into the New Testament and erase any preconceived notions about what assemblies were like and then find out afresh what they were doing and why. And that's where I'm coming from.

00:03:43 - James Early

I love that. I think it's really hard sometimes to strip away the layers of Christian practice today. I often say, as one of my taglines, getting back to the original Christianity of Jesus without all the stuff we've added in the last 2,000 years. And I think sometimes we don't even realize the many, many layers of things that were not in the original message of Jesus or in the original way that his message was shared in the assembly, what we'll call church, whatever. I don't even know if I can use that word with you. Church. I mean the word church. In the Greek New Testament, ekklesia means the gathering, the community of people. Correct.

00:04:28 - Tom Wadsworth

It's. Yeah, assembly might be a really good, short, mostly reliable translation of that word. It's an assemblage of people and it's not a building, let's put it that way.

00:04:38 - James Early

Right, right, right. Well. And the Christian assembly, assemblage of people didn't even have their own buildings for hundreds of years. Correct.

00:04:49 - Tom Wadsworth

True. That's true.

00:04:50 - James Early

Yeah. Well, so I'm just curious before we get started, I just love to know what God is doing in your life right now.

00:04:59 - Tom Wadsworth

Oh, my. Well, I'm 71, James, and I'm finding this is a good place in life. The focus on maturity, on patience, compassion, slowing things down. It allows God to speak and gets me to be much more humble, get myself out of the way those kinds of things are. Even though I would have shot for all that when I was in my 20s, yet there was too much testosterone or something involved that prevented me from getting there. But now I'm finding in this twilight of life, I like it. And just finding more peace and oneness, I think, with God. Yeah. That doesn't mean I can't be wrong and can't be stupid and do bad things, but it's a nice place to be.

00:06:00 - James Early

You know, I totally relate to that. I know when I was young, I thought, just give me a few guys and we'll go save the world. It didn't quite work that way. There was a lot of humility that God gently, or not so gently put on my plate a lot of humble pie to eat. And you know, I really appreciate your little phrase getting yourself out of the way. I use that phrase sometimes. And yeah, it is a good place to be because then you're not personally responsible. You're just responding to what God is doing or saying or where he's putting you and placing you, what

situations he has in store for you. So I love that. As I said, we're going to be talking about this whole idea of quote unquote, Christian worship. That's a phrase we use today all the time. But your basic thesis is that that's not really the right word to use. That's not what the early Christian assemblages got together to do. So before you even get into all that, I'd just be interested to know what got you interested in this whole topic to begin with. What was there some little aha moment? Or was it a gradual. Or what was it that...?

00:07:19 - Tom Wadsworth

Aha! Light bulb turning on. This was. It was October of 1977. James I was in my first year of full time ministry as a pulpit minister and I was preaching through First Corinthians and I came to First Corinthians chapter 14. And looking at this chapter I, it deals totally and completely with the Christian assembly, what you're supposed to do, what you're not supposed to do, and why you're supposed to do it. I thought that was interesting. And all of a sudden it dawned on me that Paul never said in this chapter that the reason you get together is to worship God. He doesn't use worship language to refer to the things that they were doing when they got together. And yes, they sang, yes, they prayed, yes, they did all that. But Paul and well, any nobody in the New Testament uses worship language to refer to what Christians did in their assemblies. And that began literally on that day In October of 1977, a massive study that I poured myself into studying the word worship throughout the Bible every time it's found, and whatever Hebrew or Greek derivation it comes from, all of those. And finally in 2016, I decided, enough. I'm going to do a PhD program, take my tentative conclusions literally and I'm going to throw those up against a PhD wall and see what sticks. And six years later, in 2022, I got my dissertation. And I mean, really, the amount of work I've done on this is incredible. And it's well ingrained in my Head. But it was an aha moment that began in 1977 that made me realize that here's the fact, here's the fact, you can take this one to the bank. That the New Testament does not in fact use Greek worship terminology to refer to what Christians did when they gathered together. Now we do that, but they did not.

00:09:20 - James Early

So let me interrupt here a second. Tom, when you say worship terminology.

00:09:25 - Tom Wadsworth

Yeah.

00:09:26 - James Early

Give me an example of what you mean when you say worship terminology that is not being used by the New Testament authors.

00:09:32 - Tom Wadsworth

Yeah, good. Well, this is where it starts to get complicated and it's inevitable that we got to get into some complications here. There are five different Greek words in the New Testament that are sometimes translated as worship. However, none of those five mean what we mean when we say worship today in 2024, especially here in America. So their great confusion begins to reign over the topic. These five different Greek words, it should be recognized that none of them are synonymous and none of them refer to what Christians do when they get together. So that is what I meant by Greek worship terminology. Now it is true that English, modern English worship

terminology does indeed refer to what we do when we get together, but Greek worship terminology did not refer to what Christians were doing when they got together in the first century.

00:10:35 - James Early

So can you give me an example of what you're talking about?

00:10:39 - Tom Wadsworth

Yes. Let's take for example, Romans 12:1, a well known verse. Paul there is coming to a big conclusion there from his long chapters in Romans. And there he says, therefore, by the mercies of God, offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your. Here's where the English translation comes in. Spiritual worship. That's what some translations say. Some translations don't use the word worship there, but when we see that word worship, we immediately think of what we do when we get together in assembly. But the word there is *latreia* in Greek. And not to get in too much of an academic approach here, but the *latreia* word there is simply referring to what Jews did when they offered sacrifices and what Paul is saying there. As Christians, the way we now offer sacrifices is by offering our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. He's not talking here about what you do in assembly. He's talking about what you do in.

00:11:48 - James Early

Your life, everyday life. Exactly.

00:11:51 - Tom Wadsworth

Yeah, exactly.

00:11:53 - James Early

Okay, so let's talk about what was going on in those early assemblages of Christians. What did they do when they got together?

00:12:04 - Tom Wadsworth

Well, I think almost first we need to erase some preconceived notions we might have in our mind. Number one, you can erase the preconceived notion that they're gathering in some sacred building, some church house, some house of God. That is just not the case. There has been a lot of people who have responded to my videos, said, well, they met in the synagogue and that was a sacred space. Well, first off, they did not, in fact, meet in the synagogue. Paul went to the synagogue to preach the gospel to the Jews there, but the Christians weren't meeting there. And secondly, I would question whether they even viewed the synagogue as a sacred space. I think that is highly doubtful that they did that. So, number one, erase the idea of a sacred space. Erase the idea of them gathering for worship. They would not have looked at it that way. That is a fact. Read your New Testament. It is just abundantly clear there. So when they gathered together, they knew that they were gathering together to build up one another. That is the focus. That is the purpose. Paul emphatically makes that point in First Corinthians 14:26. And we do not have to assume that he is talking about something else and then apply it to the assembly. No, he is talking there about the assembly, what you're supposed to be doing. And he uses this particular Greek word seven times in this one chapter, which is the longest chapter in the Bible, that deals

with the Christian assembly. And that one word is oiko dome. What it means is to build up one another, to strengthen one another, to edify one another. And he says, whatever you're doing in the assembly, let all things be done for edification. So when Christians gathered together in somebody's house, more than likely. Not that that's a sacred space either. When they gathered together with their brothers and sisters in Christ, they would have recognized that we are all saints, we are all holy ones, and we are there to build up one another so that we are strengthened for our Christian walk in life, so that next week we might actually be better people than we were this week.

00:14:21 - James Early

Okay, so was there any kind of... There wasn't any kind of church hierarchy, really. There weren't pastors, or did they take turns leading? What did they do? They read the Scriptures? Did they talk? What did they actually do? We know what. What they did, or we just kind of know everything they did was to build each other up. But what was actually going on? Do we have any idea about that?

00:14:45 - Tom Wadsworth

Yes. Let's talk about the persons, the people. You said there weren't pastors. They would have called them primarily elders. Elders is the term that seems to be used more frequently than any other term in the New Testament to refer to people who had a leading role in each one of these Ecclesiastes, each one of these assemblages. They often, if not completely, had a teaching role. There was teaching that went on in these assemblies by these elders, but everybody also had the freedom to speak, which is clear in First Corinthians, chapter 14. There wasn't just one person getting up, dominating the whole thing and doing all the messaging, presiding over this, presiding over that. Now, there was several people. In First Corinthians 14, he talks about, Let two or three prophets speak and let the others weigh what is said. Let a couple people speak in tongues, but be sure to have somebody then speak up and talk about what that meant. What's the translation? What's the interpretation of that tongue? So he's clearly mentioning a number of people participating in that assembly. It's not just one person. It's a bunch of people all contributing in the body of Christ with the gifts that they have been given.

00:16:03 - James Early

Yeah, that's very different from this model that a lot of churches have today, where you just come and sit there and listen to one or two people preach the sermon, somebody sings some songs, whatever. There's a wor. A worship band. I don't think there were any worship bands in the. In the early Christian church. Say, as a little side note here, did you ever see the movie about Saint Francis of Assisi called Brother Sun, Sister Moon?

00:16:33 - Tom Wadsworth

No.

00:16:33 - James Early

Oh, you should. It was. It came out in 1978 or something like that, was directed by Zeffirelli. It was really, really beautiful because it shows this very traditional service where it's very ritualistic and there's no life in it. And then it shows St. Francis after he's built his little chapel, and there's

just joy and life and everybody's there having a good time. And it's like you feel like that's what church ought to be about.

00:17:06 - Tom Wadsworth  
Yeah.

00:17:06 - James Early  
Anyway, you would probably enjoy that movie. I'm thinking of how we have morphed into what we're doing today, and I'm sure that could be a whole study in and of itself. But what can we learn from what was going on in the New Testament to help us? Well, I'll say get back to or reinstate some of the spirit of what you're talking about. Are you saying we should get rid of our church buildings, just meeting people's homes? Should we fire the pastor? I mean, most churches are not going to probably do that. What can we do today to get back to this sense of edifying one another that you're talking about?

00:17:50 - Tom Wadsworth  
I have a series of seven videos there on YouTube, and the number seven, I think it's titled, what do we do Now? And there I identify like nine things that I think can be applied in almost any church situation, any denomination. But one of the things that it seems to me becomes important, and that is to break large groups into small groups. I do not think that the purpose and the goal of edification takes place very well at all in a large setting where people just sit back and listen and then they walk out. When they are done, it needs to be in small groups. And that was part of the magic of the small group of the house. Churches in the first and second and third centuries, these were smaller gatherings where they knew each other. They felt free to contribute to the discussion. And I've always felt that people don't grow until they're able to engage with the topic themselves and start to talk about it and talk back about it, and then it starts to internalize. But if you just sit there and listen, more than likely an hour later, you're going to forget the whole thing. So you got to have some engagement. And that's where the small groups become very important. And another thing I would say that has to become primary. When everybody walks into this gathering, whether it's a big one or a little one, whether it's in a house or in a cathedral, edification should be top of mind. Not only how am I going to be built up today by what other people are doing, but how am I going to contribute to the building up of other people here?

00:19:34 - James Early  
Oh, now that's a really good point because I think the model is you go to be edified by the preacher, perhaps, or the songs or whatever. Yeah, but what are you doing if you're just sitting in a crowd of hundreds of people, what are you doing to do your part of edifying? Yeah, yeah, that's a good point.

00:19:54 - Tom Wadsworth  
Let me build on that. There's a. There's a Greek word in the New Testament called alilon, and it's translated with two English words, one another. And in the New Testament, one anothering is happening frequently. That word, I think, is found over 100 times in the New Testament. Comfort one another, exhort one another, encourage one another, confess your sins to one another, be patient with one another. It goes on and on. Love one another, edify one another. I think long enough, I could come up with about 20 of these. But all these one anothering activities

are things that we have very little opportunity for in today's church culture, no matter what church you are in. And I think there needs to be more opportunities for that. And unless you get people in a small group and unless you allow other people to talk, you are probably not going to get much one anothering done. And what is most important, we are not going to be growing, we are not going to be maturing. And that is the number one thing that I think has been lacking with our modern system. People are not growing or maturing to become wiser, more compassionate, more skilled communicators as Christians. And the New Testament approach to this does tend to build people who will be able to teach and be much more compassionate and mature as the weeks and years go by.

00:21:27 - James Early

You know, that's a really interesting point. Well, a couple of things I want to say. I know I have friends in various churches and they talk about their small groups and that's really an important part of their church experience because they do have that. I love your phrase one anothering. That's beautiful. This whole idea of being in small groups and helping each other. Yeah. So you're saying in a big church people should make sure they have those opportunities. Oh, you're talking about you don't learn, you know you do. You learn when you give of yourself and you can then apply it and you can help and help teach someone else. That's true in any field. You've talked about all these different Greek words that are often translated as worship or other things in different translations. Do you have a favorite Bible translation that maybe sheds light on this better than others or are they all kind of not clear on this topic?

00:22:27 - Tom Wadsworth

I frankly I've been using more frequently than others the New American Standard Bible which came out with a new revision in 2020.

00:22:37 - James Early

Right.

00:22:37 - Tom Wadsworth

It tends to be more literal and I find that we need to the more literal approach is more helpful for somebody with an academic background like myself. You can use any of the translations you want. You're going to learn about God and about Jesus and the Gospel with any of them. But that's the one I've been using as far as any of them. Teaching more about this. The stuff I'm talking about, I don't think there is any one that is any better than any others. Frankly, a translation issue that affects this more than any others is the translation of these five Greek words as worship. I think that is a problem and I think that gets to confuse the modern English speaking person who reads the Bible and sees that word because they are immediately going to think of that. Even though that word, when it is found, is never used to refer to what Christians do when they get together, still we're going to think of that as soon as we see that word. And it's found hundreds of times in the Bible.

00:23:41 - James Early

It's interesting. I was looking up some phrases, some verses, and one of them I found is in Acts 13, verse 16. And Paul is standing up, he's maybe in one of the synagogues, I think in Antioch or something. And he says, fellow Israelites and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me, that's

the niv. But the word is phobeo or whatever it means to fear God. It doesn't mean. It's not even that word. That is often one of the other words that's translated worship. So it. It's more of a sense of fearing God or reverencing God. After I saw your videos, I started to see what you're talking about. Somebody fluent as a Greek reader in that time period back there, they would have known what all those different Greek words meant, right?

00:24:31 - Tom Wadsworth

Yes, they really would have. As soon as phobeo would have popped up, the Greek speaker would have known exactly what that's referring to and it would not have confused it with our modern idea of worship.

00:24:44 - James Early

So let's come back to that whole idea, because you keep talking our modern idea of worship. How would you define our modern idea of worship that you're saying is not really what we should be doing? Because I'm sure different churches have different definitions of what it means to worship today. So why don't you. Why don't we talk about that a little bit, just to give us some context here.

00:25:06 - Tom Wadsworth

I think as a general rule, the English word worship, and you can look it up in Merriam Webster's or any one of your standard dictionaries, it basically refers to things that we do for God in an assembly, in a religious service of some kind. This is worship. Sometimes people use the word worship outside of a Christian assembly context as well. But since the explosion of the praise and worship music in the 1990s, I think there has been a greater shifting of the semantic range of this term to refer to music. We have our worship band and our worship leader, and we have our worship time. And we're now going to. Let's worship God together, we say, and typically we're talking about singing anymore with that, Although we would broaden the definition. But that's another way that the English word is shifting in its meaning. And by the way, all words are in a constant state of evolution and we need to be aware of that. And that awareness is also what drives a lot of the biblical translations. Why the NIV or the New American Standard would come out with an update. Because language is changing and the translations need to change with the times to make sure they still communicate the first century ideas of the New Testament in modern terms. Accurately.

00:26:36 - James Early

Yeah. So I'm thinking of a couple of verses that you've kind of piqued my curiosity. I'm thinking of a couple of verses where Jesus uses the word worship. This is in his conversation with the woman at the well, woman of Samaria at Jacob's well. They get into this deep conversation pretty fast. I love that whole expose there. But she says, well, you Jews worship in Jerusalem at the temple. We worship on this mountain. And then Jesus says, you, you guys don't know what you're worshipping. At least we're, we're doing it right. I'm barely paraphrasing, but he says the time is coming when God is going to look for people to worship him in spirit and in truth. Could you talk about which word that is in the Greek and what that actually means?

00:27:27 - Tom Wadsworth

Yes.



00:27:28 - James Early

And what it means then to worship? He said, not in a temple or on a mountain, but worship in spirit and in truth, that's a very different thing than.

00:27:36 - Tom Wadsworth

Right.

00:27:36 - James Early

I mean, you can do that anywhere, obviously. So what do you think? Jesus was talking about that in light of that word translated as worship, which tell me what the Greek word there is and what it means.

00:27:46 - Tom Wadsworth

The Greek word is proskyneō, and it's used 10 times in those four or five verses in John chapter 4, verses 20 to 24. The Samaritan woman was pointing to the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim there in that context. And the temple is where the Samaritans went to do proskyneō, whatever that means. But it was in Jerusalem, the Jerusalem Temple where the Jews went to do proskyneō, whatever that means. So my challenge was to figure out, what does it mean? Well, the word is used 61 times in the New Testament, and it's used 204 times in the Greek Old Testament, known as the Septuagint. And so we have this enormous database of places where the word is used that we can study to see how Jews typically used this term. Right. And as it turns out, what we want to know with regard to John chapter four is what does proskyneō mean when it is used in a Temple context, because clearly that's what's going on in John chapter four. It's either the Samaritan temple where they're doing proskyneō, or it's the Jerusalem temple where they're doing proskyneō. And there are dozens and dozens of places throughout the Old and New Testament in the Greek where the word is used in a temple context. And without going into deep detail right here, let me just say this. It is clear that the word means to prostrate yourself. These temples, whether it's the Samaritan temple, the Jewish temple, or even a pagan temple, like of Athena or Artemis or Diana or whatever the pagan temple is, when people went to that temple, they viewed that temple as the place where that God resided, whether it is the Samaritans or the Jews or the pagans. And the first thing you do upon entering that temple is you prostrate yourself. That is the only way to present yourself before your God, before the living dwelling place of your God, is to prostrate yourself. And this is clear. I mean, this is really clear. This is not a guess. I can back this up with a ton of research. Believe me, it's all in my dissertation. But yeah, ritual prostration was the first thing that a worshiper did when they went into temple in the first century culture. So that's what is under discussion in John chapter four as well.

00:30:32 - James Early

Well, and so when Jesus says to worship in spirit and truth, I get the sense that that means you don't have to go obviously to a temple, whether you're literally physically getting on your face on the ground, but spiritually having a sense of humility and the presence of God, which should be every minute of the day. Is that what he's talking about when he says worship or whatever that word is again, that you said, Proscaneo. Yeah, proscaneo. What does that mean to proskyneō in spirit and in truth?

00:31:05 - Tom Wadsworth

Yes. I think Jesus is making two points here. The first one about proskynoe in spirit and in truth. I think he's making the same point here that he made in the Sermon on the Mount, where he's talking about praying and fasting and giving. A lot of people were doing those things in the synagogue just to be seen by men. They're just going through the motions as a religious exercise to see how religious I am. The same thing applies to prostrating yourself. And there's ways to prostrate yourself where you look really religious. But of the thousands and thousands of people that would go through the Jerusalem Temple to prostrate themselves before their God. There were people who were undoubtedly just going through the motion. I got to do this. You may have seen in modern culture, we see images of Muslims going to a mosque, and they are all on their knees with their head down and their hands forward, going through the motions. Well, that begs the question, well, are they sincere or are they just going through the motion? I think this is not a criticism of Muslims or anything. Or not saying that they're all doing it insincerely. I'm saying this is a natural question when it comes to any sort of physical gesture that one does for religious purposes.

00:32:29 - James Early  
Right?

00:32:30 - Tom Wadsworth

And what Jesus is saying, you do it in spirit and in truth, you do it. It's true. Your prostration, it is sincere. It is being done with your spirit. And as Jesus says, God is spirit, and those who prostrate to him must do so in spirit and in truth. So that is one of the points he is making there. The other point that he is making there is that the temple is going to be insignificant people. God does not dwell in buildings. He's a spirit. He cannot be confined within the four walls of any structure anywhere. I think it's one of the many places in John and throughout the Gospels where Jesus openly predicts the absolute destruction of the temple. Matthew 24, Mark 13, where he spends an entire long chapter in predicting the demise of the temple. It's going to go away, folks. It's going to be obsolete. And so start to think about what that means with your own life. But what Jesus is pointing to in John chapter four is God is spirit, and we must be devoted to him spiritually and truly. It's got to be sincere.

00:33:51 - James Early

Yeah, that is really wonderful. I love the way you shed some light on that. Now, I'm thinking about some of those verses where it said someone came up and worshiped Jesus. And I'm not sure which of those Greek words it was, but that probably means they. There's actually sometimes you'll see from one gospel to the next, it'll be translated worship. The other one will say, you know, they bowed to the ground to him or something. They got on their knees to him or whatever. So those situations are probably. They're literally prostrating themselves physically to Jesus. It's not necessarily worshiping him the way we think of that word. Is that correct or...?

00:34:34 - Tom Wadsworth

That's exactly correct. No, James, you've got it. That's it. And that is what that word means. When you see somebody, you see worshiping before somebody or falling down and worship, being on their knees and worshiping. That's the English translation. But the translation should be prostrating themselves. You've got to fall down in order to get into the position where you're

performing this physical, religious ritual prostration. And people would do that to people, one on one to people, as they did to Jesus. Whether they are regarding him as God, we do not know for sure in these various cases. Some cases, it seems to be pretty clear they are treating him differently. But there's also many, many cases throughout the Old and the New Testament where prostration pros kaneo is performed before people. And it just simply remains they prostrated themselves out of respect and submission. And sometimes loyalty is also connoted by that act.

00:35:34 - James Early  
Yeah.

00:35:35 - Tom Wadsworth  
Imagine now, James, if somebody walked into your room right now and saw you and greeted you by dropping down to the ground, face to the ground, pointing to you, hands out in front. That's obviously an act of great submission and respect. My kids have never done that to me. No, no, not going to happen. But, you know, maybe I long for the day, but.

00:36:00 - James Early  
Well, isn't that what Cornelius did when Peter came and Peter said, no, just stand up. And there were other places where he said, yes, I'm just a man. Stand up. Yes, we're equals in a sense.

00:36:12 - Tom Wadsworth  
Yes. That's an important point and theological reality that's behind, I think, the absence of prostration in the Christian world. Because you don't see Paul ever referring to the fact that Christians are to prostrate in their lives physical prostration. And nor do you see this in the second century Christian literature or third or fourth. This act of prostration leaves the world of Christianity while others are still doing it. You know, they are going into their temples and they are bowing before their God. Christians do not do that. Why? Well, God now is no longer found inside a temple someplace. He is found inside this temple, the temple of our body. God dwells now within. Jesus is Emmanuel, which means God with us, Christ in you, the hope of glory right now, because we all have God within us. We are all hagios, we are all saints. We are holy ones. Why? Because God is in us. And therefore we need to treat each other with tremendous respect. We treat the church building with great respect because we figure that's God's house. Well, this is God's house now. So we need to act in holiness and with respect to one another because God now dwells in people, not in some building somewhere.

00:37:45 - James Early  
This is really fascinating, because I know some congregations who. They're so preoccupied with maintaining their building. And I know some churches who've actually sold their building and they've found some smaller, more appropriate space or they found some other solution. And it's not about the building anymore. And I think there's a shift going on with some of that in some places. I don't know. It's interesting to hear you talk about all this because, I mean, I have felt for a long time the church is not the building, it's the people. It's the love, the sense of community you have for one another. So here we are today in the 21st century, and there are many different approaches to. I'll use the word worship. There's many different things and approaches we take when we gather together. And you started to mention some of those things in that seventh video. You talked about getting into small groups. What are some other things we can do to really get to

the essence of what it means to be in God's presence collectively and edify one another in that process?

00:38:58 - Tom Wadsworth

Yeah, I think what God really, really wants is for his people to be united, for his people to help one another, to build up one another, and it's for his people to grow. I mean, he didn't just come just, okay, you're all saved. You're done. Just you can go on and live your life for the rest of your life. It is done. No, no. We have got these developmental stages to go through for the rest of our lives. There is an interesting verse in Hebrews 5, verse 12, where the writer says, by this time you ought to be teachers, but you are not. So there was this expectation that people should be growing not only in their spiritual graces, but in their skills. You ought to be teachers by now. And not everybody's going to have that gift of speaking now. That's clear also in the New Testament. But we ought to be growing and developing and getting better. So you mentioned what can we be doing in our assemblies that I think inevitably we've got to have more participation by more people. That's not going to work in a large venue. If you've got 100 or 1,000 or 10,000 people in a crowd, you can't have a dozen people speaking. It's just going to be too confusing. Eventually you got to drill down into a small group. And I think churches do well when they promote and encourage their people to get involved in a small group, whether that is in somebody's home or in some classroom in their building or in a restaurant, wherever it is, get involved in a small group where there's some focused content that's under discussion that leads people toward a better Christian life. And let people talk, let them express themselves, the things they're struggling with, the things they disagree with, and let's deal with that. I think through that process, we all get better.

00:41:03 - James Early

Yeah, that's really powerful. What would be your ideal vision? Let's say somebody's just starting a brand new church and they don't. They don't have anything in place yet of the way it's structured or organized. If you could be there and sort of help them plan that, what would be your ideal setup for the way it's organized or how it's led? Would there be a pastor, would there be a leadership team, whatever? What's your vision for. For that?

00:41:35 - Tom Wadsworth

I think there's probably a variety of visions that, you know, some people start a church as an intentional evangelistic endeavor. They're seeking to gain as many disciples as possible in a given community. And so the way they organize their gatherings might be a little different. What I see in the New Testament and Paul in Acts, chapter 14, he has gone into some of the communities there in the area of Turkey, near Antioch, he has established a group of new Christians and he goes back then and he appoints elders in every church and he commits them to the kingdom. He wants them to be growing from that point. We've got these cell groups taking place with some leaders. They're involved in them. And their point now is to let's get better, let's grow in the Christian faith as we gain new and new and more disciples. They have worked into the assembly and we all start to grow together through this mutual teaching that's taking place. Yes, there's praying, yes, there's singing, all those things. Yes, there's the Lord's Supper as part of all this. But it's all intended to build up one another in unity and in maturity as Christians.

00:43:00 - James Early

Yeah. What is that place in the New Testament where Paul. It seems like things have gotten out of hand, maybe with the Lord's Supper. And he says, and I may have this wrong, but there's something he says. When you come together and assemble, don't do it to have a meal because some people are taking advantage of it. Do you know where I'm talking about?

00:43:19 - Tom Wadsworth

Yes, this is 1 Corinthians, chapter 11, starting with verse 17 on through the end of the chapter, which I think is around verse 34, 35. But yes, he doesn't say, don't take a meal. He says they were coming together for a meal, the Lord's supper. By the way, the word supper means supper. It means a meal, and it was a meal. But the problem there at Corinth was there were some rich people who were bringing their own food and they were ignoring the poor Christians who may not have had anything to eat, but they were going ahead with their own meal and just ignoring the needs of their own brothers and sisters who just simply were less off. And Paul chides them, saying, what are you doing? You are not regarding the body of Christ, which includes these poorer Christians, and you need to be waiting for one another so that we all can participate together in the Lord's meal. That was the problem at Corinth, and that's how Paul advises them to get better at it.

00:44:28 - James Early

So my question now is, you talked about language evolving and word. Word meanings evolving. Is there a legitimate way for the way Christians assemble together to evolve? I mean, obviously things have evolved, whether it was right or not. I mean, I've heard people complain about all this worship ban stuff. It's almost a distraction from the message. But some people get all emotionally high on that and they think it's wonderful. But is there. How do I ask this question? Are we trying to copy what the early Christians did? Are we letting the Holy Spirit guide us today to maybe something that's different than the way they did but meets our needs today? Does that question make sense?

00:45:18 - Tom Wadsworth

Yeah, it does.

00:45:19 - James Early

Where's the right balance in all that?

00:45:21 - Tom Wadsworth

Yeah, my videos have been viewed over 350,000 times, and I've been receiving around 5,000 different comments and emails just in the last two months. James.

00:45:33 - James Early

Oh, wow.

00:45:34 - Tom Wadsworth

And this is a common thing that people will say to me. They assume that I'm proposing that everybody meet in homes or that the first century church was static and it needs to stay that way forever. What I see Paul saying in First Corinthians 14, he allows that there's a great deal of flexibility. He understands that there's a lot of different things going on in the assembly at

Corinth, and he doesn't really criticize any of them except the idea of speaking in tongues without it being translated so other people can be edified by it. The one thing that I think is cannot change from the first century to this century is the purpose why we are getting together. And Paul repeatedly states that the purpose of your getting together is to build up one another. Now keep that as your goal, Keep that as your purpose. And however you get There, folks, you can evolve and change and develop as time goes by, but as long as people are being built up and edified into being better, more mature Christians, you know, the details are not that important. What's important is that you're growing.

00:46:49 - James Early

I love that. And I just want to reemphasize what I'm getting from what you're saying is you're not going there just to be edified by a preacher or a worship leader or whatever we're going to call them. We're all supposed to edify everyone. We all need to bring our own gifts and talents that God has given us to help whoever else is there. And I think in a, in a healthy community of a church membership, I know that goes on in our church. We all love each other. We stand around and talk after church is over for sometimes half an hour because we, we want to be supportive of each other. And I think that's sometimes more of a church feeling than during the quote unquote, church service. I mean, that's important too, and I like that. But that support you're feeling from your fellow church members is really powerful. But it's also powerful when you can help them. I love the way you summed that all up.

00:47:52 - Tom Wadsworth

Yeah.

00:47:52 - James Early

We've got a closed shop here in just a few minutes, but before we do, I'm curious if there's anything on this whole topic that you wish people would ask you, but either don't think about or don't for whatever, is there something that you wish more people would ask you or maybe something I haven't asked you that you wish people would think about in all this?

00:48:17 - Tom Wadsworth

Yeah. The question would be, Tom, what are we missing today? Sometimes people want to ask what are we doing wrong? Or what are we doing right? But I think the real important question is what are we missing? As you look at things the way they were in that first century, the way Christians got together and what they were supposed to do and all the things that are said about it, what are we missing today? Now, to be painfully honest there, I think we're missing a lot. And I think people are recognizing it. A church attendance patterns are plummeting. And that's not an exaggeration. I've been doing church attendance statistics in my own community for the last 40 years. Oh, wow. And today we have dropped 60% from where we were 40 years ago.

00:49:08 - James Early

Wow.

00:49:08 - Tom Wadsworth

Of. In other words, of 100 people sitting in a pew in 1984, there's only 40 people left. And believe me, once you get down to just a few people, it's harder to maintain, it's harder to pay for

the building, it's harder to pay for a pastor. And thus things start to crumble quickly. And I've been watching churches close, watches churches just shrink, getting rid of staff cell buildings. This is a serious situation. This is going on not just in my community, but nationally and even globally. Churches are dying. And so what are we missing? I think people recognize what we're missing is when I'm going to church, I'm not getting anything. Folks going through the same old motions, doing the same old rituals with seeing the same old guy give the same old sermon, folks, I got other things to do. But people are also craving relationships and other people opportunities to talk and to talk about this stuff which is so meaningful and deep and yet they do not get that when they go to church, whatever that church is. And I am talking about Baptists or Catholics or Orthodox or Mennonite, anybody, it is still a problem of having these opportunities for building relationships and opportunities for one anothering. And if we can see that we are missing that and find new ways to re inject one anothering and edification into our gatherings, I think we are going to start to see some growth again. Even if we do not, at least the people who are there are going to be growing and getting better and Christianity is going to be better represented in the public eye by people who are actually better and not just the same scoundrels they were 10 years ago.

00:51:06 - James Early

That's a beautiful answer. I've thought about this question a lot too. I think one of the things we need more of is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, I'll call it. I've gotten to the point in my faith where I'm kind of tired of all the doctrine and the theological debates and defining Christianity by what you believe. Jesus said the tree is known by its fruit. You'll know my disciples by their love for one another. Yeah, that love for one another is that one anothering you're talking about. I did a podcast episode earlier this year about why I don't adhere to the Nicene Creed. There are several reasons, but the one that's pertinent for this conversation is that it doesn't say anything in there about how to practice your faith. It just says I believe, I believe, I believe. There's nothing about loving God with all your heart. There's nothing about loving your neighbor as yourself. There's nothing about repentance or forgiveness. There's nothing about how you're supposed to treat people. And that's what Jesus said makes a Christian. So I think one of the things we need more of is focusing on doing what Jesus said to do, loving the way he loved people, instead of all these theological debates and oh, my doctrine is right and everybody else's is wrong. That's a turn off for me, and I think it's been a turn off for a lot of other people, too. I love this idea of one anothering. I'm just gonna. I love that phrase. I'm gonna remember that. Tom, I want to honor you for all you're doing to kind of reawaken people, to this idea of what church is all about, what the gathering, the assemblage is all about. I don't know what words I can use now. The assembly of fellow believers, getting back to the spirit and essence of what it was like there in the first century. I just think that's wonderful. All this, really a lifetime curiosity and then your dissertation work. I just really appreciate that. And I think it takes a lot of courage sometimes to stand up and say to the larger Christian world, well, hey, there's some things you're not doing right. People don't always like that. But I really appreciate that about you. Is there any final thing you'd like to share or maybe sum things up or just a final idea that you'd like to share with my listeners?

00:53:33 - Tom Wadsworth

I think you kind of did it there in your own comments. We do need to love one another better. We need to love our neighbors as ourself better. And I think that's what these assemblies were

for Hebrews 10, 24 and 25, which has often been used as a way to scold Christians to make sure they go to church. But what it says was stir up, stir up one another to love and good works. Not neglecting to meet together, but so the point of meeting together is to stir up one another to love and good works. And if we did that every week, every time we assembled together, I think we'd be better people. Not just next week, but for sure, 10 years from now, if you're doing it every week. I mean, something's going to sink in eventually. I would hope that the whole Christian community would be a much more loving and good working group of people if they emphasize those things every time they gather together.

00:54:41 - James Early

I love that. So I'm going to issue an invitation to everyone who's listening to this podcast. Tom and I are going to invite you to when you go to church, not just this next Sunday, but whenever you go to your church or your small group or your house church, where however you're assembling together, go with the motive to stir each other up and be willing to be stirred up yourself to love and good works. It's about loving each other, one another together. I just love this idea. So I encourage you to take that as your motive when you go to church and see what a difference it can make over time.

00:55:26 - Tom Wadsworth

Agreed. I'm with you, James.

00:55:28 - James Early

Awesome. Tom, how can people get ahold of you?

00:55:31 - Tom Wadsworth

I have a website, [Tomwadsworth.com](http://Tomwadsworth.com) or go to YouTube and just look. Enter Tom Wadsworth. And I've got a YouTube channel there where my seven videos on this topic are all there. And those are the things that have been getting so much attention here by more than a third of a million people here just in the last two months alone. Not everybody likes what I'm saying. Some people really don't like it, as you can imagine. But if we just look at it, I think all I'm saying is stuff that's actually really, really good for us, all of us as Christians, it's not bad at all to be loving one another and to be edifying one another. This. How is this bad, people? It's all good. And none of it is saying that we're not supposed to worship God anymore because we praise God, we pray to God. He's integrally involved in everything that we're doing and always have been. So yeah, that's all I'm saying.

00:56:28 - James Early

Good. Well, I will have those links in the show notes and I hope you'll check those out. I really enjoyed those videos. Very thought provoking and very enlightening. Tom, I have three final questions I ask all my guests. The first one is if you could talk to any Bible character other than Jesus, who would it be and what would you ask them?

00:56:53 - Tom Wadsworth

Well, I talked to Paul and I don't want to start a whole other discussion here, but Paul, why did you tell women to be silent? What was going on there? Because something's not quite fitting with my modern sensibility of what Christianity is. Why would you shut those women up?



There's so much to be gained from those folks. That's one thing I would ask. Paul, what's going on, Paul? What's the deal? So that's. That's question number one.

00:57:23 - James Early

Okay, I will send you an interview I did with Nejay Gupta. I don't know if you know him. Yes, he has a book called Tell Her Story. We talked about that. So you might enjoy listening to his thoughts. He talks about all the women leaders in the New Testament in the Christian church.

00:57:45 - Tom Wadsworth

I'm in. I'll do that. I'm not unfamiliar with that work. I've got his recent book called Strange Religion. I don't know if you've seen that.

00:57:52 - James Early

No, I've seen it. I haven't read it yet, so.

00:57:55 - Tom Wadsworth

Very good. Yes.

00:57:56 - James Early

He's a really fascinating guy.

00:57:58 - Tom Wadsworth

Say the name of that book again was what?

00:58:01 - James Early

It's called Tell Her Story.

00:58:03 - Tom Wadsworth

Tell Her Story. Okay, thank you. Nijay Gupta.

00:58:07 - James Early

Right. Okay. The second question is, Is there any Bible character who you especially identify with?

00:58:15 - Tom Wadsworth

Well, anymore? I'm taking a whole lot of flack James from these worship videos. And I mean, I've been called a false teacher, a heretic. I have been accused of blasphemy.

00:58:30 - James Early

Hey, they did that to Jesus, too.

00:58:33 - Tom Wadsworth

Oh, that's why. That's why. That's where I'm leading here. I'm feeling a whole lot like Jesus anymore or anybody who was persecuted for what they believed. And Paul was as well, of course. And I'm identifying with that. I get it. It's a dangerous thing to say. You know, you're persecuting me just like you persecuted Jesus. Well, I'm not Jesus, so there's a lot of differences

there. But at least identify with the hatred and the strong opposition, which I've received from some sources.

00:59:08 - James Early

Right. Well, he. Jesus said, if they hated me, they're going to hate you. They're going to kick you out of the synagogues. And I think we shouldn't be surprised by that. But it's human nature, really. It's fear. They're afraid that you're challenging the status quo.

00:59:27 - Tom Wadsworth

So you're right.

00:59:29 - James Early

All right. The third question is: The Bible Speaks to You Podcast is, as we've talked about, getting back to the original Christianity of Jesus. How would you describe Jesus's original message of how he wanted us to live our lives?

00:59:48 - Tom Wadsworth

The word love comes to mind. Love one another. Be compassionate as he was. Be humble. Pride is the opposite of where we need to be at all times. Yeah, I think maybe that's love, humility and being compassionate. Maybe those three things. There'd be a whole lot more, but let's just stop it with that.

01:00:14 - James Early

Yeah, that sums it up as well as you can. Tom, I want to thank you so much for spending some time with me today. I know my listeners will really appreciate your message. It's been a really fun for me getting to know you a little bit, and I hope we can keep our relationship going indeed.

01:00:35 - Tom Wadsworth

God bless you, James. I appreciate your podcast and I've enjoyed talking to you.

01:00:39 - James Early

All right. I hope you have enjoyed my conversation with Tom Wadsworth and I hope you will check out his YouTube channel. I'll have that link in the Show Notes. If you found this helpful, please share it with a friend. And I'm going to reiterate the invitation that Tom and I are putting out to you. I want to encourage you to go along with this verse from Hebrews 10:24:25. Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works encouraging one another. When you go to church this coming Sunday, think about that. And not just this Sunday, but every Sunday afterwards. Let's find ways to support each other and participate in that one anothering that Tom was talking about. If you have any questions about today's episode, I'm sure Tom would love to hear from you. I'll have his website in the Show Notes and if you'd like to be in contact with me, I'd love to hear from you. Go to my website, [thebiblespeakstoyou.com](http://thebiblespeakstoyou.com) and just click on the Contact tab. I can't wait to be in touch. If you haven't subscribed yet to the podcast while you're on the website, click that subscribe tab in the menu bar. Just fill out the little form and you're all set. That way you'll get an email each week and you'll never miss an episode. If you want to read a complete transcript of today's episode, you can also find that on the Show Notes page for today's episode and you'll find that at [thebiblespeakstoyou.com](http://thebiblespeakstoyou.com) 267 this is episode 267 and that

link will be on the Show Notes on your podcast app if that's where you listen to the show. I'll also have a list of all the Bible quotes. There were a whole lot of them today, so if you want to see all those together, you can find those on the Show Notes page as well. I want to thank you so much for all the ways you've been supportive and for being here and listening week after week. If you're new to the podcast, welcome. So grateful to have you here. And that's it for this week. I'm James early with the Bible Speaks to you podcast. Have a great week. Take care and we'll see you next time. God Bless.