

Corporate weapons of our warfare.

Introduction

Today I will be teaching regarding 2 of the corporate weapons of our warfare. That includes corporate prayer and corporate fasts. Unfortunately for the church today, we have not yet tapped into the fulness of the power of these corporate weapons. You see, many come from collectivist backgrounds, but by and large, when it comes to church the predominant mentality is an individualistic consumerist one.

Today, I am going to ask you some questions and I want you to reflect back on yourself and answer yourself honestly. Do you have any of these attitudes towards church?

- What church will meet my needs? (As opposed to where is God planting me? And where will I add value?)
- What church is convenient? (As opposed to where can I best serve God and my fellow believers?)
- What church preaches the messages I want to hear? (As opposed to what Church has sound doctrine that will preach what I need to hear even if it isn't always what is comfortable to hear?)
- What church doesn't challenge me too much, or confront my lifestyle too much? (As opposed to where will I grow?)
- Which church can I go to that will allow me to tick the church box, whilst not requiring anything else of me?
- What church can I hide in?
- Oh, and I don't need the church, I just go because well, that's the Christian thing to do.

You see, these are some of the predominant attitudes towards church that we are facing. And unfortunately, the church will remain divided and powerless, lacking unity, insipid and weak as long as we entertain these ideas.

You might say to me, well, it's not my job to do anything in our church community or gatherings. It's not my responsibility to bring the presence of God, or the miracles and breakthrough when I am in a gathering. Well, the Bible says that Jesus couldn't do many miracles in his hometown because of the people's unbelief. So in actual fact, the level of glory, power and miraculous that the church walks in is all of our responsibility. Imagine, Jesus Himself, couldn't do many miracles there because of the state of the hearts of the people there. He couldn't do many miracles there

because the people were not in agreement and at the same level of belief as Him. There was disunity in that respect.

“Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.” (Mat 13:58, NKJV)

And so let me in the introduction answer the question why corporate prayer and fasting is so important.

In the book of Acts we see the church doing many amazing things.

*“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, **they were all with one accord in one place**. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Act 2:1-4, NKJV)*

- One accord
- One place.

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common,” (Act 2:42-44, NKJV)

- Fellowship
- Breaking of bread
- Corporate prayer

We read in the NT how the church is described as:

1. A body

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ....[14] Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. [15] Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. [16] And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. [17] If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? [18] But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. [19] If they were all one part, where would the body be? [20] As it is, there are

many parts, but one body. [21] The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 1Co 12:12-21 (NIV)

e.g. of going for MRI.

We go together. We do together. My hand serves the purpose for the whole body. As the feet do. The mind can't be adamant about staying home to do the assignment, whilst the legs want to go do a cycle and the shoulder needs an MRI scan at the hospital. Do you get what I am saying?

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, [5] so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. [6] We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; [7] if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; [8] if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. Rom 12:4-8 (NIV)

You might be saying, Whoa there! Hold your horses. My life is mine. My time is mine. My weekends and Sundays are mine. My body is mine." Well, yes, in a way, but only to steward.

Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; [20] you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your bodies. 1Co 6:19-20 (NIV)

2. A household of God

People often use the term "house of God" to refer to the building the church is meeting in. This is not scripturally correct in the New Testament. We, His people, are the household of God. His temple. His dwelling place. Not the building we happen to meet in.

*Therefore you are no longer outsiders (exiles, migrants, and aliens, excluded from the rights of citizens), but you now share citizenship with the saints (God's own people, consecrated and set apart for Himself); and you belong to God's [own] household. [20] You are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus Himself the chief Cornerstone. [21] **In Him the whole structure is joined** (bound, welded) together harmoniously, and it continues to rise (grow, increase) into a holy temple in the Lord [a sanctuary dedicated, consecrated, and sacred to the presence of the Lord]. [22] **In Him [and in fellowship with one another] you yourselves also are being built up [into this structure]** with the rest, to form a fixed abode (dwelling place) of God in (by, through) the Spirit. Eph 2:19-22 (AMP)*

*Since you have [already] tasted the goodness and kindness of the Lord. [Psa 34:8] [4] Come to Him [then, to that] Living Stone which men tried and threw away, but which is chosen [and] precious in God's sight. [5] **[Come] and, like living stones, be yourselves built [into] a spiritual house**, for a holy (dedicated, consecrated) priesthood, to offer up [those] spiritual sacrifices [that are] acceptable and pleasing to God through Jesus Christ. 1Pe 2:3-5 (AMP).*

And so, there is something to be said about a unified church, serving each other, planted where God plants and available to serve as He directs. Now I want to take this a little bit deeper and touch on a few aspects of our corporate church life, which, if we can get right, provide extremely powerful weapons for us.

3. Corporate Weapons of our Warfare:

Today I am wanting to touch on **corporate prayer, corporate fasting** and in another message, I will touch on corporate praise and worship, because that is another weapon that is so underutilized and misunderstood. Although I am going to try and address them individually for teaching purposes, if you study them yourselves in the bible. you will see that very often they appear together.

1. Corporate Prayer

a. Why corporate prayer?

Why do I need to come to pray with other people, when I can pray on my own at home and God still hears my prayer?

Let's look at a few scriptures:

""Again, I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven." (Mat 18:19, NKJV)

"Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight; your enemies shall fall by the sword before you." (Lev 26:8, NKJV)

We also see that it's the corporate church has certain authority and might.

"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." (Mat 16:18, NKJV)

Gates represent authority. They were the places of influence in the OT. Leaders would sit there. The gates of hell will not prevail **against the church**.

i. **Because Jesus calls His house a house of prayer for all nations.**

"these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations." (Isa 56:7, NIV)

And He taught and said to them, Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations? ... Mrk 11:17 (AMP)

The Greek word Jesus used for house here is:

οἶκος (oikos)

Strong's defines it as a *dwelling*; by implication a **family home, house (-hold), temple**.

Jesus describes His body as a household of prayer.

That means a household. That's a **place where we are together, the place that he makes His dwelling and abode**.

Jesus called His house a house of prayer. He doesn't call it a house of entertainment. He doesn't call it a house of motivation. He doesn't call it a house of preaching or giving, or signs, wonders and miracles. He doesn't call it a house of grace, or salvations or harvest. These things are all good and godly and part of His purpose for us to be involved in, but he called it a house of prayer. That means that it is characterized by prayer. Everything else that happens stems from prayer, is rooted in prayer. Is birthed in prayer.

ii. **Because the early church in Acts models this.**

"...the book of Acts reveals that the early church was serious about praying together. They prayed together in the temple and in their homes, when they were sick and when they were filled with the Spirit, at mealtimes and in times of persecution. Again and again we find them all together, devoting themselves to prayer. As our local churches take up valuable projects in the places where we live and work, we must not neglect that most vital work that undergirds everything we do." Megan Hill

In Acts 4 we see Peter and John had been taken before the religious authorities and threatened and commanded to stop preaching the gospel.

*"When they heard the report, **all the believers lifted their voices together in prayer** to God: "O Sovereign Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them **After this***

prayer, the meeting place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God with boldness." (Act 4:24-31, NLT)

There was something about the early church where they understood the power of standing together in unity for each other and for the Kingdom. They understood the power of corporate prayer.

*Every believer was faithfully devoted to following the teachings of the apostles. Their hearts were mutually linked to one another, sharing communion and **coming together regularly for prayer.*** (Acts 2:42TPT)

We see Paul and Silas seemed to have a habit of going to prayer:

*Now it happened, **as we went to prayer**, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. Act 16:16 (NKJV)*

iii. **Because we are instructed in the New Testament epistles to do so.**

*"Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us **not neglect our meeting together, as some people do**, but encourage one another," (Heb. 10:24-25, NLT)*

Paul instructing Timothy regarding the corporate gatherings:

Therefore, I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, [2] for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. [3] For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior... [8] I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, **lifting** holy hands, without wrath and doubting... (1Ti 2:1-3, 8 NKJV)

iv. **Because there are certain breakthroughs that only occur with corporate prayer**

*"But while Peter was in prison, **the church prayed very earnestly for him.** The night before Peter was to be placed on trial, he was asleep, fastened with two chains between two soldiers. Others stood guard at the prison gate. Suddenly, there was a bright light in the cell, and an angel of the Lord stood before Peter. The angel struck him on the side to awaken him and said, "Quick! Get up!" And the chains fell off his wrists. Then the angel told him, "Get dressed and put on your sandals." And he did. "Now put on your coat and follow me," the angel ordered. So, Peter left the cell, following the angel. But all the time he thought it was a vision. He didn't realize it was actually happening.....Peter finally came to his senses. "It's really true!" he said. "**The Lord has sent His angel and saved me** from Herod and from what the Jewish leaders had planned to do to me!"*

When he realized this, he went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many were gathered for prayer.''' (Act 12:5-9,11,12 NLT)

Corporate Fasting

a. What is fasting?

I would like to talk about fasting in general. What fasting is and what it's not.

It's not abstinence. If you abstain from sex or TV or chocolate or something else, that's not a fast. That's abstinence. It has its own spiritual value for our lives, but it's not a fast. **Fasting is not a crash diet**, weight loss plan, or detox. It's not something to be done for spiritual recognition or to try and gain approval from God.

In the OT, the word fasting simply means "to cover your mouth". In the NT it means "not to eat". So biblical fasting is to do without food. Anytime you do without food, is that a fast? No. Not necessarily. Abstaining from food is not a Biblical fast. Fasting is also useless if it is done to feed a religious spirit, for image or any other twisted motive.

Fasting should be done for God's purposes, glory and Kingdom. For His will to be done. And there are many types of fasts in the Bible:

- **Absolute fast:** no water or food. Max 3 days unless a supernatural fast. Moses underwent 2 of these for 40 days. Impossible to do in the natural.
- **Complete or total fast:** only water. Most likely what Jesus underwent for 40 days.
- **Partial fast:** many forms.
 - Juice fast
 - One meal a day fast
 - Bread and water fast
 - Daniel fast

But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself....Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink....The steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables. (Dan 1:8,12,16 NKJV)

The benefit of a partial fast is that it can be done for many days whilst retaining strength for normal day to day activities. If one can do a complete fast however, that is more beneficial.

b. Why fast?

i. Because Jesus fasted:

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. [2] And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Mat 4:1-2 (NKJV)

I find it interesting that Jesus was baptised in the Holy Spirit before being led into the wilderness to be tempted. But that it is only after he has completed his fast and that season of tempting by the enemy that it says this about Him:

Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. (Luk 4:14 NKJV)

Fasting is a key that unlocks things that otherwise remain as they are. Fasting brings spiritual power.

In Mat 10:1 Jesus called His twelve disciples to Him, and He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of diseases. Some time passes and a situation presents itself to Jesus and the disciples... we read about it in Matthew 17 and Mark 9:

The father of a mute boy comes to Jesus and tells him

"Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. [18] And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not." ...

The boy was brought to Jesus ...

[25] ... He (Jesus) rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!" [26] Then the spirit cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him

Jesus took him by the hand and the boy stood up.

*[28] And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" [29] So He said to them, **"This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting."***

Jesus obviously had a lifestyle that included fasting. Remember what he said about his disciples and fasting:

Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?" [15] And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. (Mat 9:14-15 NKJV)

Jesus is no longer on the earth and so the time to fast is now.

ii. Because Jesus assumes we will fast:

In fact, Jesus when teaching on fasting assumes that we will fast. He says, "when you fast,..." not "if you fast..."

*"Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, **when you fast**, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly." (Mat 6:16-18, NKJV)*

When?

There is a certain level of power, glory and authority that the church simply will not walk in if she will not fast.

iii. Because we see fasting as a pattern throughout the Bible for various breakthroughs:

- Disciples fast (Mat 17:20-21)
- The Ezra fast (Ez 8:21-23)
- The Samuel fast (1 Sam 7:1-8)
- The Elijah fast (1 Kings 19:2-18)
- The widow's fast (1 Kings 17:12)
- The Paul fast (Acts 9:9-19)
- The Daniel fast (Dan 1:12-20)
- The John the Baptist fast (Matt 3:4)
- The Esther fast (Est 4:16)

The most important fast is

- The fast God chooses (Is 58).

Whichever fast and for whatever purpose, may it be the one God has chosen.

The fast God has chosen (Is 58:6-12)

- *"Is this not the fast that I have chosen:*
- *To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke? **Brings freedom and deliverance.***
- *[7] Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, And not hide yourself from your own flesh? **Should be done with mercy, compassion and outward focus.***
- *[8] Then your light shall break forth like the morning, **Brings light***
- *Your healing shall spring forth speedily, And your righteousness shall go before you; **Brings healing***
- *The glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. **Brings His glory***
- *[9] Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; You shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.' **God answers***
- *"If you take away the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, **It must include personal change and consecration.***
- *[10] If you extend your soul to the hungry And satisfy the afflicted soul, **Should be done with mercy, compassion and outward focus. Spiritually and naturally.***
- *Then your light shall dawn in the darkness, And your darkness shall be as the noonday. **Brings light and breakthrough.***
- *[11] The LORD will guide you continually, **Brings guidance***
- *And satisfy your soul in drought, And strengthen your bones;*
- *You shall be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. **Brings satisfaction, strength, refreshing.***
- *[12] Those from among you Shall build the old waste places; You shall raise up the foundations of many generations; And you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Streets to Dwell In. (Isa 58:6-12 NKJV) **Nations are built and restored, foundations for generations are laid.***

There are many aspects to the fast God has chosen. Many results from and reasons to fast listed in this scripture. I would like to finish this section on fasting with the account of Jehoshaphat when his enemies came against him.

And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. So, Judah gathered together to ask help from the LORD; and from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD. Then Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD, before the new court, and said: "O LORD God of our fathers, are You not God in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand is there not power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You?" (2Ch 20:3-6, NKJV)

He continues praying with the people. This was what happened after the prayer:

"Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah,... in the midst of the assembly. And he said, "Listen, all you of Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem, and you, King Jehoshaphat! **Thus says the LORD to you:** 'Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's. Tomorrow go down against them. They will surely come up by the Ascent of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the brook before the Wilderness of Jeruel. You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the LORD, who is with you, O Judah and Jerusalem!' Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, for the LORD is with you.'" (2Ch 20:14-17, NKJV)

- The Lord ministered to their immediate emotional needs
- The Lord uncovered the position of the enemy
- The Lord gave them the strategy and battle plan
- The Lord encouraged them

This is all in response to the fasting and prayer in the corporate gathering.

What would have happened if they hadn't gathered, fasted and prayed?

Conclusion

- Today we have looked at how the church is a body that has many parts and many members and how the members all need each other.
- We looked at how she is the household of God. And how she is being built up into a dwelling place of God.

And so with these corporate pictures in mind we explored some of the reasons behind

1. Why we need to pray corporately:

- Because Jesus calls His house a house of prayer for all nations.
- Because the early church in Acts models this.
- Because we are instructed in the New Testament epistles to do so.
- Because there are certain breakthroughs that only occur with corporate prayer

2. Why we should fast and fast corporately:

- Because Jesus fasted
- Because Jesus assumes we will fast
- Because we see fasting as a pattern throughout the Bible for various breakthroughs
- What is fasting?

We finished by looking at some of the aspects of the fast God has chosen:

- Brings freedom and deliverance.
- Should be done with mercy, compassion and outward focus.
- Brings light
- Brings healing
- Brings His glory
- God answers
- It must include personal change and consecration.
- Should be done with mercy, compassion and outward focus. Spiritually and naturally.
- Brings light and breakthrough.
- Brings guidance
- Brings satisfaction, strength, refreshing.
- Nations are built and restored, foundations for generations are laid.

Reflection Questions

How do you view your role in the church? Do you see yourself as an active participant or merely a consumer?

In what ways have you experienced the power of corporate prayer or fasting in your life or community?

What attitudes or behaviours in your life may contribute to disunity in the body of Christ?

How can you shift from seeking convenience in church to seeking where you can best serve God and others?

Are you willing to embrace discomfort and challenge for the sake of spiritual growth and unity in the church?

What steps can you take to foster deeper unity and commitment within your church community?

How do you understand the distinction between fasting and abstinence in your spiritual practice?

In what ways can fasting enhance your personal and communal relationship with God?

Reflect on a time when you experienced a breakthrough as a result of fasting or prayer. How did that experience impact your faith?

How can you ensure that your fasting practices align with the fast that God chooses, as described in Isaiah 58?

What practical steps can you take to engage more deeply in corporate fasting and prayer within your church community?