

Pursuing Partnership: Moving Mountains of Strongholds

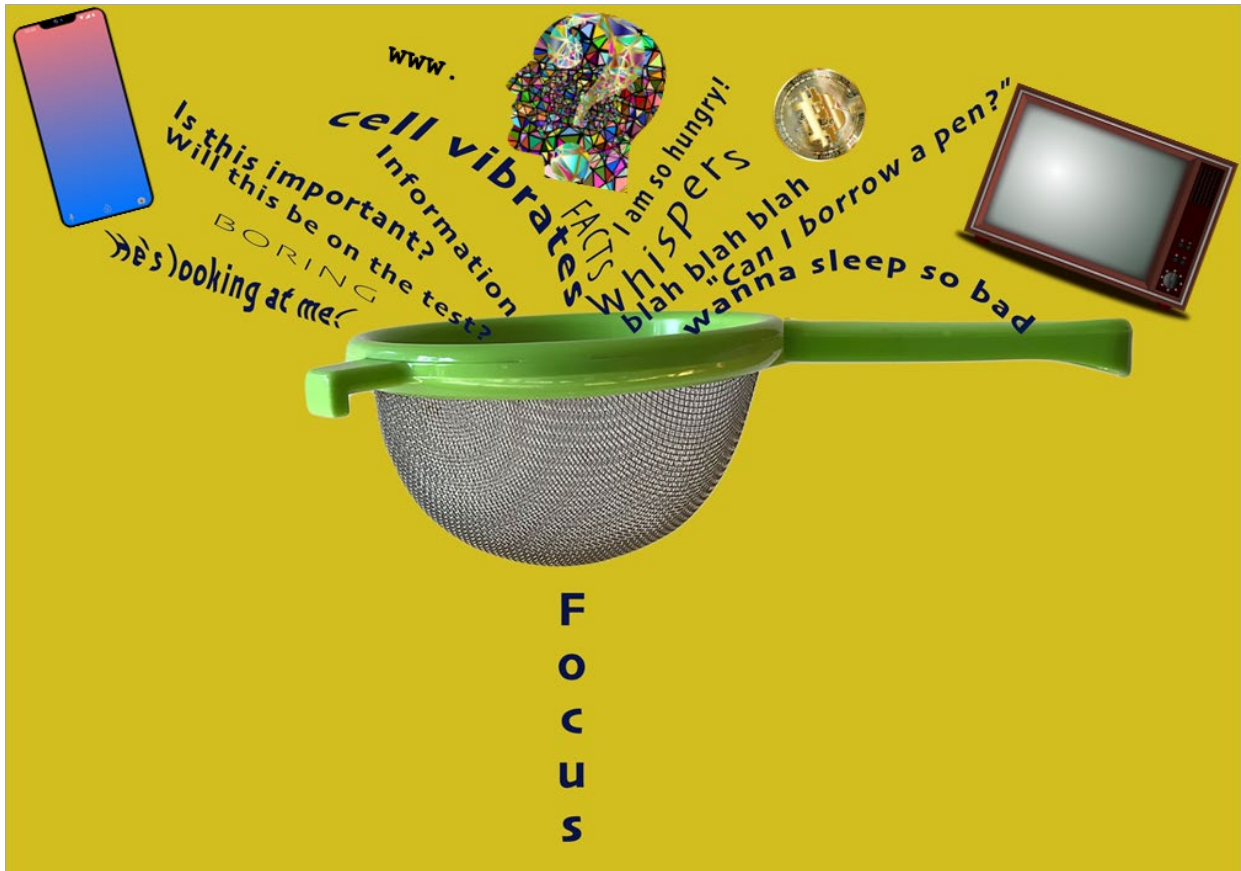
Stronghold #8 – Distraction

by Drs. Leslie and Chad Segraves

<https://servingshouldertoshoulder.com>

In this series of blogs, Leslie and Chad identify spiritual strongholds that need to be unearthed and removed so that godly men and women can partner well together for the completion of the Great Commission. Pray with us into these mountains, and by faith may these tectonic plates move in Jesus' name!

Distraction



God wants to populate heaven. Satan wants to populate hell.

The Gospel of Matthew gives a glimpse into the heart and the strategic urgency of Jesus in three verses:

*"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like a sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. **Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.**'" (Matthew 9:36-38)*

The word "compassion" in the Greek conveys a gut-wrenching empathy. Why? Because Jesus saw the lost and wandering crowds of people who needed a Shepherd. So, what did he do next? He conveyed

the strategy that he knew would move the message! Workers are needed – so PRAY! Ask God to mobilize more workers!

Then entered the nasty stronghold among the redeemed. **Distraction.**

It really shouldn't be too hard. Release more workers to tell the message. But the redeemed began to argue, "Well, what can specific workers do?" Or "No, I don't think you can do that – you're a girl." "We need a man trained in seminary with a degree." Or "Women can do these set of things, but not these." And round and round we go. We can guess Jesus' response to inward-focused bickering and limiting theological boxes, but we also have a feeling Satan loves it and laughs. As we debate, another person enters eternity without a messenger to share with them the Good News of Jesus' hope and forgiveness.

God blessed and commissioned both male and female to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue, and rule (Gen. 1:28 and Matt. 28:19-20). This awesome global mandate should be the clear focus of every one of God's redeemed, image-bearing ambassadors. To lure people away from God's global mandate, the Tempter causes us to lose sight of the goal through multiple distractions. He brings confusion and debate to the clearest of God's instructions.

The Apostle Paul continued with high-intensity urgency, moving out disciples to teach and reach more people. 2 Timothy 2:2 says, "*And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.*" If Paul wanted to exclude women from the task of teaching, he missed a good opportunity. "People" comes from the Greek word *anthropos* which means "humanity." Paul could have used the word meaning "males," but he did not. Therefore, he opened the door for godly "reliable" believers, male or female. Be not confused! God's mission requires us all!

Debate and Uncertainty Lessens Our Urgency for the Main Thing!

During my (Leslie's) doctoral research, I studied leadership in the Kingdom of God. I researched four house church networks within Asia. The research revealed... *Three groups that encouraged women to use their spiritual gifts had more corresponding fruit.* Conversely, the group that limited women focused on theological debate and interpreted the "difficult passages" about women with little regard for Paul's cultural background, and less corresponding fruit.

Among the four models, "urgency for the lost" ranked highest among the first three church planting models. (To see Leslie's full research project, contact us. It's rather like a tidal wave of biblical urgency, strong theology, logic, and grassroots research, not that I (Chad) am biased!).

At times, some groups may not release women because they are not sure if it is biblical. It is good and right that we "*study to show ourselves approved*" with the Scriptures. There are solid theological answers that hold to Scripture and shows that God wants to release both male and female into his mission. But don't get mired down in debate. Go, make disciples, baptize and teach!

Wrong Starting Point Lessens Our Urgency for the Main Thing!

Men and women who simply advocate for women in leadership must NOT lose sight of the main thing which is the Gospel to all nations. Sadly, many who advocate for women in leadership often lose sight of the Gospel in their pursuit of equality or fairness. Jesus never promised to return when men and women achieve equal rights or when human trafficking is stopped. But he did promise to return when his kingdom has been preached to all ethnic groups (Matthew 24:14).

Rights should never compel us; God's Mission should. Our thoughts and efforts to help men and women collaborate must never be an end in itself. Rather, it is a strategic tool for the release of more workers to the masses of people who still need a Shepherd.

An American woman in her 30's once told us, "I always knew I was smart, talented and gifted. I used my gifts in corporate America and did well. I just figured God didn't really need me in the church because I was a woman."

This, dear friends, is what happens when a church has few role models of women in leadership, poor theology of men and women, and little vision for the least reached.

The clear Gospel message remains urgent in our broken world today. May we quit hiding behind debate and "equality" ideology and boldly reflect God's heart for the world. When urgency for Jesus' name truly grips our "gut" (Matt. 9:36-38), we will discover that God has a whole army of women and men he wants to release for his purposes. And no power of hell should attempt to stand in the way.