



PURSUING PARTNERSHIP: MOVING MOUNTAINS OF STRONGHOLDS

12 Strongholds Impacting Men and Women

God blessed and commanded both male and female to multiply, fill, and rule the earth together. Who would want to stop men and women using their spiritual gifts and completing the Great Commission? The enemy. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. Let's join Jesus!

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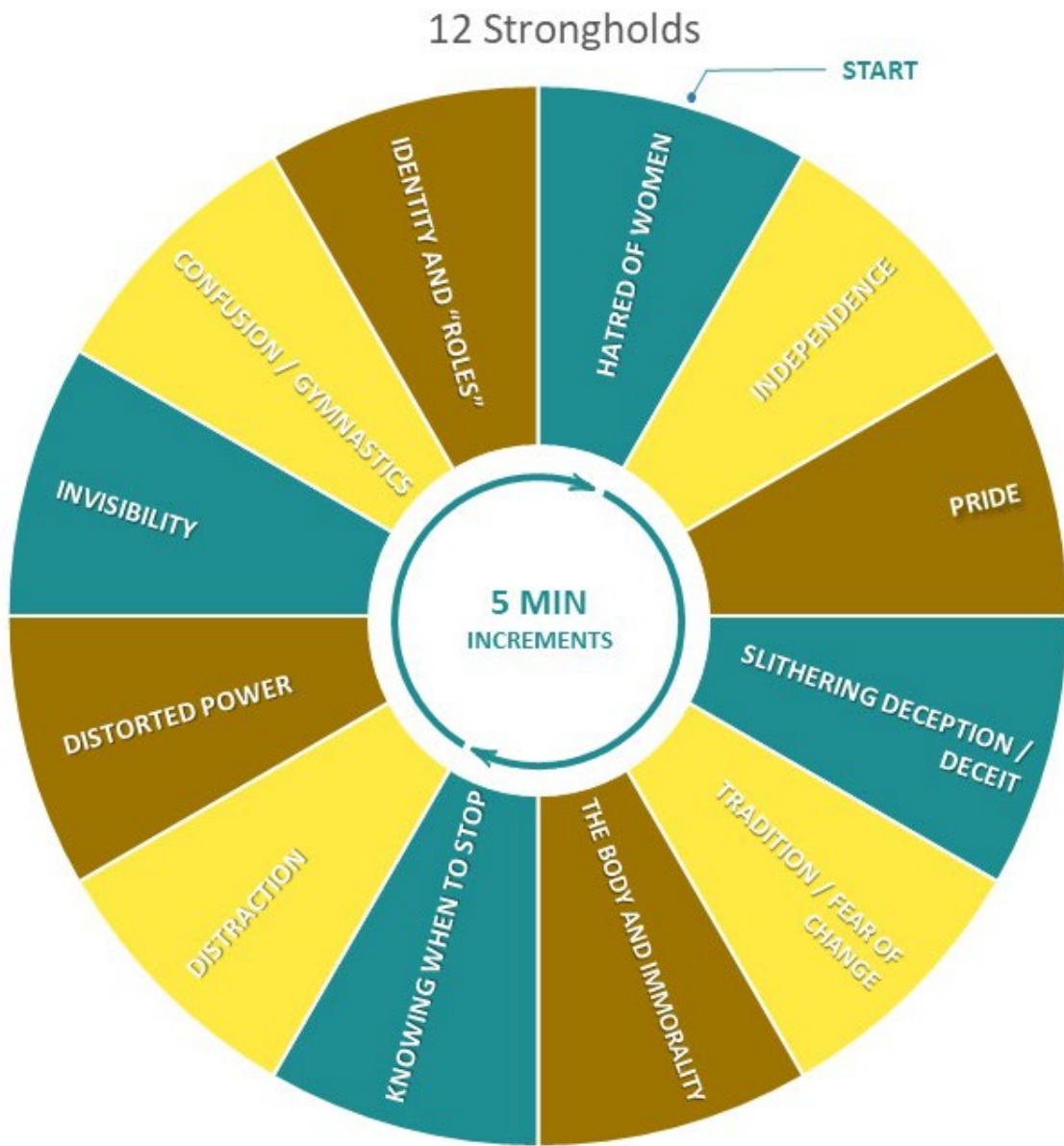
60-Minute Prayer Graphic for the Strongholds

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Overview of Stronghold Scriptures

Enjoy an Intense Hour of Prayer into 12 Strongholds Impacting Men and Women



Pursuing Partnership: Moving Mountains of Strongholds

Engaging the Battle for Men and Women in Partnership

by Drs. Leslie and Chad Seagraves

<https://servingshouldertoshoulder.com/about/>

Overview of Strongholds

Years ago, a young woman approached Leslie on the campus of Delhi University:

“I heard that you teach about marriage. So, I have two questions. In my culture, both Hinduism and Islam teach that men are here and women are here (her hands showed men high above women). What I want to know is this... What does the God of Christianity think about men and women? And what do the followers of your religion practice?”

Leslie answered both questions, and the young woman replied, “Thank you for your honesty. Because of what you said about your God, I want to explore Christianity more fully.”

As the young woman walked away, we once again realized the powerful message the Church would send the broken world if we revealed how Jesus could redeem us not only *spiritually* but also *practically*. The lost world would see God places true value on both daughters and sons.

God laid out his beautiful plan for men and women in Genesis 1:27-28 and Jesus repeated it in Matthew 28:19-20. God clearly revealed that He created both male and female in his image. He then gave them both the Edenic mandate – a mandate which required both men and women to engage side by side and shoulder to shoulder to all nations. Jesus repeats this mandate in Matthew 28:19-20, and in Acts the Spirit came to indwell all believers – both male and female so that they could fulfill the Great Commission. Jesus also told us to pray for more laborers because the workers are few (Matthew 9:37-38).

The enemy hates God’s laborers working in unity. So throughout the ages, Satan has structured his plan to distract, disable, and disqualify some people from engaging fully. The topic of “who can serve God” and “in what capacity” affects Christians in all cultures and all generations. Often godly women are limited, devalued, and discriminated against – even within the Church. Here are a few examples:

“What are we to do? We have given our blood for Jesus and been honored to follow Jesus into prison. But now our house church has read books from [Western pastor] and he says women should sit down, not speak, and not lead the church any longer.”

Combined quote, multiple Chinese sisters

“I used to evangelize all the time and lead Bible studies. Lots of people came to Christ. Then I read this book by [Asian Pastor] that women should never lead or speak or try to teach any man. So now I have stopped. I want to be obedient.”

25-year-old Indian sister/evangelist

“Does God love boys more than girls? That’s what boys said in my class at school today after the teacher taught about creation.”

9-year-old girl in Christian School in U.S.

As missiologists who have lived within many cultures over the last 25 years, we believe restoring the fractured relationship between male and female is crucial to completing the Great Commission. Getting this relationship right will require overcoming not only biblical confusion, but also millennia of spiritual strongholds. Thankfully, Christians are built for battle as we follow Jesus who came to “destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8)!

To reiterate our battle purpose, A.W. Tozer described two ways that Christians view the world – as a playground or a battleground. He described many Christians who live with a wrongheaded worldview, thinking that we are here simply to “play around” and wait for Jesus’ return. The lazy players say, “We are NOT here to fight; we are here to frolic.” How wrong they are!

Increasing gifted and godly laborers is certainly a battle! To engage well, we must be grounded in Scripture (not tradition, opinion, or a desire for rights/position.) We must have substantial and significant prayer lives. Hudson Taylor, missionary to China, said, “If you would enter that province, you must go forward on your knees.” He understood any spiritual progress is a prayer-filled battle.

For men and women to “progress spiritually,” we must go forward on our knees, because the enemy hates us as God’s image bearers, hates God’s powerful co-reigning design, and hates the fulfillment of God’s mission. The deadly spiritual war between people and the enemy goes back to the very beginning. The enemy deceptively attacked the male/female relationship and established his own rule. Such an ancient and deep war requires mountain-moving faith and mountain-moving prayer. Indeed, men and women partnering well requires the shifting of whole tectonic plates!

The topic of male/female collaboration is a worldwide battle, a supra-territorial movement of specific spiritual “tectonic plates” (strongholds) that reframes the shattered male/female relationship. Do we reflect God’s holy intent, or do we mirror the fallen world? Such movement is no small feat. This battle involves no small demonic powers. Male/female relationships undergird and substantiate every culture and every family. The restored relationship between redeemed men and women will also release more laborers needed to complete the Great Commission.

We have identified a series of spiritual barriers that hinder men and women from working well together. Through the strongholds we discuss in the following articles, the enemy sows discord and rips people apart. The enemy loves these strongholds since they cause: women to suffer rejection, men to suffer and grow in pride, decreased laborers reducing the spiritual harvest, a distortion of God’s image, and dishonor towards God.

We invite you to advance on your knees and enter the battle with us – not “frolicking on a playground,” but “fighting on the battleground.” This fight/study should cause you to pause for reflection. Some of the strongholds you may recognize within yourself. If so, repent and continue to fight! Other traps you may see binding other people. Intercede and keep going!

Jesus wants disciples from all nations. God intends for a strong team of godly men and godly women to bring in the harvest. One key part of that unified labor force is recognizing and interceding for the removal of enemy-inspired, tectonic plates. Prayer moves the plates that move the mountains.

[Let us pray together to see these mountains move, in Jesus’ name!](#)

Pursuing Partnership: Moving Mountains of Strongholds

Stronghold #1 – Satan Hates Women

by Drs. Leslie and Chad Seagraves

<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!

Satan Hates Women.



On a recent Zoom call with East Asians, we asked, “*Who is more often abused physically in your culture – women or men?*” Immediately they responded, “*Women.*” A few months ago, we taught in a female prison in Tennessee. We asked the ladies, “*Who is usually hurt sexually more in the U.S. – men or women?*” Without hesitation, they answered, “*Women.*”

Around the world, women are targeted, and the onslaught of this vicious attack on women is inspired by the hatred of the Enemy. God said that there will be “*enmity between you [deceitful serpent] and the woman and between your offspring and hers*” (Gen. 3:15).

Filthy Enemy Desires

The enemy wants women to be neglected, abused, hindered, erased, and dead. He loves it when they are aborted in utero, undereducated as children, and abandoned when elderly. He wants their feet bound, their bodies exposed, their minds disregarded. The enemy wants them burned alive with their dead husbands (*sati*). He loves to conceal them in black cloth shadows their entire lives. He wants them murdered for “*family honor,*” or sexually violated as a shame-producing weapon of war.

Satan wants women to either obsess over men or abhor them. Satan wants women's gifts to be disregarded by the Church and for Christian women to feel unable, unwanted, and invisible in the local church.

Satan wants women to devalue themselves and never know their true worth. He loves it when they talk badly about themselves or slice others with their words. The enemy wants them erased from the record books of high achievement. Satan laughs when nations confuse women's empowerment with women's exploitation.

So, from a place of direct or indirect oppression, Satan's hatred for women weaves a world of destruction, inferiority, and dishonoring. Will the Church pray up, stand up, speak up to this demonic stronghold of direct spiritual and physical onslaught? Note that there is no corresponding Bible verse that says directly, "Satan hates men." Satan of course hates men, but the Bible directly indicates the hatred Satan has for women. This is why the Church needs to be alert to this scheme so that brothers and sisters within the Church do not fall into Satan's traps. May we resist acting like non-Christian culture, in the ways they devalue or dishonor women. May we in the Church bless and encourage women, not covertly attack them with layers of sweet talk, or overtly attack them by saying their gender limits them. May we fight the enemies' schemes whether they come physically or spiritually, directly or indirectly.

It's way past time for Jesus' Bride to identify this ancient demonic stronghold against women and work with God to push back the vicious onslaught.

Not Your Peaceful Baby Jesus!

Consider 1 John 3:8. *"The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work."* Wow! Did you know that Jesus came to destroy... the enemy! We pray that this picture of Warrior Jesus, fits well with your image of sweet, baby Jesus lying in a manger, because they are the same Person. Jesus came as a tiny, helpless baby in order to stop the onslaught, to utterly demolish the rebellious and vicious kingdom of darkness. Jesus came to destroy the destroyer. Revelation 9:11 says, *"They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek is Apollyon (that is, Destroyer)."* Destroyer is the identity of the enemy, and that is the exact work that the Son of God came to destroy.

Why do you suppose there is direct enmity outlined in Scripture of Satan against women? If women were not a threat to his rule, Satan would not care about women. Yet, Satan hates them. Therefore, a simple conclusion... **women must be a threat to his kingdom.** (Selah!)

God has a staggering, mountain-moving plan for women. God created women to fill the earth and share dominion of the world alongside men (but not independent of men)! God blessed women with the incredible ability to carry life within them and to feed another human from their own body. That is a crazy, super-power! Women protect and provide life and Satan wants to steal, kill, and destroy life. Jesus the Messiah chose to enter the world through a woman! While women are clearly distinguished from men by their biology, biological function does not limit God's spiritual purpose. God the Holy Spirit, fully dwells inside women who follow Christ, empowering them for any task that God desires. God has empowered women to have a relationship with God and within that relationship to be used by God to change the world.

Hatred Based on Fear

Satan fears women because he knows the power that male and female image-bearers possess when they *work together in unity*. Of course, Satan wants women to have NO spiritual access or inheritance or impact. He wants them to NOT evangelize, worship, lead, influence, or serve. He wants local churches worldwide to ignore them and devalue their contributions.

Let's be men and women who humbly rise in the face of such large demonic opposition towards females. Such a vicious enemy gives an obvious opportunity for the Church to shine! This humble and powerful partnership terrifies the hater of women!

Pray churches will open their eyes to see how they can intentionally value, build up, and benefit the women in their midst as they serve in God's mission alongside their brothers.

Key Verses for Prayer into Stronghold #1 – Hatred of Women

Genesis 3:15

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.

1 John 3:8

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

Revelation 9:11

They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek is Apollyon (that is, Destroyer).

2 Timothy 1:7

For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

Pursuing Partnership: Moving Mountains of Strongholds

Stronghold #2 – Independence

by Drs. Leslie and Chad Seagraves

<https://servingshouldertoshoulder.com>

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Independence



God's Gift of Unity

Unity is a spiritual weapon. Therefore, the enemy loves to fragment men and women with an attitude of independence!

God created men and women to live out harmonious relationships. It started so well! In Genesis 2, we find the man in the Garden of Eden searching for something similar to himself among all the animals, but none were like him. Not even close.

Until *finally* God brought him a fellow image bearer... the amazing woman.

When the first man saw the first woman, he broke out into the first-recorded love poem, *“Bone of my bone. Flesh of my flesh.”* His joyful proclamation illustrated how perfectly God made the couple for one another. The man was no longer alone! He had a friend, an equal strength, someone like him - but wonderfully different!

Women Originated as a Curse? NO!

The Bible stands in stark contrast with other religions’ accounts of the origin of woman. For example, in the tragic Greek story, men lived at peace on the earth without women. But Prometheus ascended Mount Olympus and stole fire from the gods and gave it to men. To punish men for this theft, the gods created the worst imaginable curse to inhabit earth alongside men... woman! The Chorus in Orestes sang, “Women were created to mar the lives of men.” Greek writer Aristophanes stated, “Women are a shameless set, the vilest creatures going.” Thankfully, the biblical story offers a different perspective, and sets out the true origins of humanity which reveals God’s heart of love and the value given to both sons and daughters.

God’s intent from the beginning was male and female, serving side-by-side in God’s presence. God designed the powerful relationship between a man and a woman – strong, honorable, holy, interdependent, and unified. Together, the world-changing couple shared a common identity – God’s image-bearers.

This God-honoring interdependence and shared identity fueled their destiny and empowered them to fulfill God’s first commands in Genesis 1:28. *“God blessed THEM and said to THEM, ‘Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue it, rule over [creation]...’”* These shared commands and shared responsibilities revealed God’s strategy for accomplishing his mission. God wants unified men and women, working together to spread God’s culture across the whole earth.

When we look back into history, we recognize God’s original intent was for men and women to be “ONE.” Therefore, it makes perfect sense that this would be the ground the enemy would choose to attack. Satan absolutely hates and fears unity between men and women. Focusing his attack of deceit and doubt led to the sinful choice and “independence,” dividing the blessed team from God and from each other. As evidence, the man’s post-Fall vocabulary switched to “I” and “me” rather than “we/our.”

Common Vision Unites

Today, Satan still seeks to keep the male and female divided, but God has another plan. We can overcome the stronghold of independence and disunity when we *“fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.”* When Jesus’ goals become ours, we move together in unity and harmony.

Years ago, we found an awesome picture frame. It offered this wisdom, **“Love does not consist in gazing lovingly into one another’s eyes, but in looking outward together in the same direction.”** We could not agree more! When men and women look up at God and look out at the world together, we unite around a mission that is unstoppable!

Just before he went to the cross, Jesus prayed, *“I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me”* (John 17:23).

As we stated earlier, UNITY is a spiritual weapon! Men alone will not “*let the world know*,” nor will women laboring alone. The impact of the godly unity between men and women in the church is reflected in the phrase, “**The WHOLE is greater than the sum of its parts.**” The UNIFIED and INTERDEPENDENT team of men and women focused on God’s mission, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and walking in faith... this team can move mountains and shake the world.

Good... Very or Not?

Recently, we saw a pastor celebrating on Facebook with the caption, “All my church leaders praying together.” He posted a picture of a room full of men. Not a *bad image* in itself, but it is a *bad understanding*! Of course, it’s great that men pray, but the picture missed the unity, the interdependence of the whole Body of Christ. It missed male and female laboring shoulder-to-shoulder, leading the church together for God’s glory.

When God walked the Garden before the Fall, he indicated that one thing was not good – the man alone, independent and without a female image-bearing counterpart. If God walked into your church or mission organization, would he say, “It is not good.” Or would he see gifted men and women working well together and conclude, “It is very good!” Unity spears the demonic stronghold of independence.

Pray believers will live with hearts of bold and courageous unity and interdependence. May the mountain of INDEPENDENCE be moved, in Jesus’ name!

Key Verses for Prayer into Stronghold #2 – Independence

Genesis 2:23-24

The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.” That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Genesis 1:28

God blessed THEM and said to THEM, ‘Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue it, rule over [creation]’

John 17:23

I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Pursuing Partnership: Moving Mountains of Strongholds

Stronghold #3 – Pride

by Drs. Leslie and Chad Segraves

<https://servingshouldertoshoulder.com>

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Puffed Up with Pride – And God Hates It.



Yucky Pride!

Years ago, we attended a church in Bangkok, Thailand. A Thai woman preached a powerful message that day, and we learned she served on a team of pastors at the church. We asked if we could meet her. They took us to a room, and she came in looking a little nervous. We expressed to her how much we enjoyed the sermon, and she looked both shocked and relieved. She said, *“That is so encouraging to hear. Sometimes when Westerners come, they walk out if it’s my turn to preach because I am a woman. It hurts so much.”*

Now it was our turn to look shocked. We told her how sorry we were to hear of Westerners who did not walk with humility or recognize the Holy Spirit in her life and message. As we sat together, she shared

more of her story. *“Before I preach, I pray and I prepare. When I preach, I can’t help it, the Holy Spirit just comes over me. But that causes some problems. Some of the male pastors here get angry. I try to encourage them, but sometimes I think, ‘Do I need to stutter when I preach so they will accept me more? I cannot help what the Holy Spirit does through me.’”*

This story highlights the yuckiness of pride. Pride caused Westerners to disrespect a servant of God because they could not recognize the Holy Spirit working through a female. Satan smiled as they left the building expressing their rejection of God’s daughter.

Pride caused this sister’s Asian colleagues to not accept her because they felt intimidated by her sermons. Rather than leaning deeper into Christ themselves, they built a wall of hostility. Satan laughed as a sister in Christ felt discouraged and confused.

Don’t Be Anti-God!

C.S. Lewis wrote, *“According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind.”*

“Pride is the complete anti-God state of mind.”

On the issue of men and women, do we have an anti-God state of mind? Heaven forbid. Yet, pride is so normal, so prevalent, and so deeply entrenched inside each of us that we often overlook the reality of pride that shapes the male/female conversation.

Some grasp for position. Some covet authority. Some twist words, or start rumors, or call names, or fail to include, or belittle, or make jokes in order to maintain their status. Others selectively quote or manipulate scripture to keep people “in their place.” Both men and women can do any of these pride-filled actions. It’s in the *wanting* that the anti-God state of mind creeps in.

Pride is a tricky demon since it all comes down to the heart’s disposition. A person consumed with lust or greed may eventually be found out, but pride easily hides. Among Christians, a haughty spirit limits intimacy with God, decreases eternal effectiveness in ministry, and limits godly laborers. So, how can we defeat and overcome an arrogant heart? Through the practice of intentional humility.

Practical Lessons in Pride

In 2010, we spoke for the Lausanne Congress about the collaboration of men and women for the sake of the Gospel. During that talk, we both said how a man or woman can fight pride in order to better collaborate:

As a man, I have learned that I fight against the Fall when I seek to empower my sisters in the Body of Christ to use every gift they are given - including gifts of teaching, preaching, and leading. It requires humility and a willingness to die to myself - to share, to give power away, to open doors. It makes me ask the question, “Am I teachable? Can I learn from anyone, whether male or female, as long as God is empowering them?” I’ve learned it’s not about maintaining my own

status, position, power, or authority. It's not about that. It's about Jesus and multiplying his workers for his mission.

As a woman, I have learned that I work against the Fall, when I use every gift that God has given me including the gift of leadership. It requires humility and a willingness to die to myself to step up in a church culture that often prefers my brothers. I cannot allow others' restrictions to be used as an excuse for my own disobedience. Daily, I have to remind myself that because Jesus died and rose again, I also am a priest and an ambassador in the kingdom of God. I must resume my responsibility to again share dominion on the earth with my brothers. It is about Jesus and about his mission of reconciliation.

Jesus defeated the demonic stronghold of pride by walking in the opposite spirit. Jesus demonstrated a life of humility. Humility, in its many forms, wages battle against the mountain of pride. May godly men and women walk in humble, submissive unity... like Jesus.

Do you want God to oppose you? Have pride. Do you want God to pour out his grace on you? Have humility! *"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble"* (James 4:6). Like Jesus, each of us should walk humbly with our gifts given to us by God, and each of us should walk humbly empowering others – with gentleness and kindness, courageously following God.

Pray God's people will live with humility – empowering others in God's mission! May the mountain of PRIDE be moved, in Jesus' name!

Key Verses for Prayer into Stronghold #3 – Pride

James 4:6

God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Proverbs 8:3

To fear the Lord is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech.

Proverbs 16:18

Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

Daniel 4:37

Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

1 John 2:16

For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.

Pursuing Partnership: Moving Mountains of Strongholds

Stronghold #4 – Slithering Deception and Doubt

by Drs. Leslie and Chad Seagraves

<https://servingshouldertoshoulder.com>

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Slithering Deception and Doubt



Serpent's Twist

Satan wants us to doubt God's character and God's word regarding men and women. It's an ancient question, "*Did God really say...?*" With those words, the deception began. The enemy's first question to the unified, innocent, and perfect couple planted seeds of doubt about God.

We must fight Satan's deception through the truth of God's Word. Through God's powerful Word, God created the world. Through the incarnation of the Word made flesh, God came down and walked with humanity. From the beginning, Satan has sought to cast doubt on God's Word with his slithering deception.

The serpent also caused them to question God's character. *"Did God really say... you will not certainly die... For God knows...you will be like God."* Even though they had walked with God, and even though they were made in God's image, this deception caused them to question what good thing God might be withholding from them. The deception turned their focus away from God and toward themselves. God had directed the couple to spread outward as God's fruitful image bearers, with God's global mandate as their supreme agenda. God's glory would fill the earth through this overcoming, dominion-sharing team. But their powerful global mandate became an inward, self-focused examination.

You may remember that St. Augustine and later Martin Luther developed the concept of *"Incurvatus in Se"* which means "curved inward on oneself." This deceitful "inward reflecting look" describes the origin of sin! The first man and woman turned away from God and away from God's mission. By the enemy's deception, the couple gazed toward their own soul, their own desires...and with their disobedience, sin entered the world.

Deceptive Darts

Satan continues to throw darts of deceit about the Bible and God's character, especially surrounding the topic of male and female. For example:

- **God "made men superior."** Some claim God that could not possibly have created "men and women as equal strengths/partners" in Genesis 1-2. After all, God created a man first, so men must be the "in-charge/leaders" of women. They claim men and women are equal, but man must be the leader (or as Muslims say "one degree above"). This understanding does not rightly characterize God and how He chose to design people. It also displays a Western worldview of linear thought rather than the Hebrew concept of parallelism (created first = created last). Satan has confused millions with this line of deceptive reasoning.
- **The Bible is untrustworthy because it says, "women are property."** Some claim that the Bible cannot be trusted because women are "not equal" in the Bible, and the Bible considers "women as property." Not only is this *wrong thinking*, but it misses the powerful alliance God created in Genesis 1-2 between men and women before the Fall. The Bible is certainly trust-worthy, women are not property, and Satan caused the whole confusion!
- **It's not just "male and female."** Some claim (and even so-called Christians are falling for this) that there are more than two genders, and thinking otherwise is unloving or "hating." This deception completely misses Creator God's clear reality of humanity created as male and female. Most who argue for transgender rights today are not fighting for the rights of people with Klinefelter Syndrome (XXY). Again, Satan is stirring up chaos on the male/female issue.

The Weapon of... *"It Is Written..."*

God's Word is solid and true. We can trust it. We can stand on it. We must study it well to show ourselves approved. The enemy knows that if we never listen to God's Word, we essentially fight without a sword. The enemy also knows that if we abandon the Bible, or deny it, or only agree with certain parts of it, we lose much ammunition in battle. Yet, Jesus showed us how to quote Scripture when in direct contact with Satan!

Like Jesus, we can overcome the stronghold of doubting God's Word through, *"It is written..."* This simple phrase remains a powerful weapon available to us today whenever we engage the stronghold of enemy deception. When we encounter direct demonic resistance related to men and women partnering in the Gospel, we should respond with *"It is written..."* then speak the truth of God's Word. We must be sure our understanding of any individual passage lines up to God's character as revealed in all of Scripture and with his ideal design he created in Genesis 1-2 – male and female as *ezer k'negedu* (equal/compatible strengths). *"It is written..."* clarifies God's character and mission and lights the path forward for men and women living under a cloud of deception.

Pray believers will recognize and pluck out any seeds of doubt sown by the enemy and walk boldly in the light of God's Word, trusting in God's character, God's design of women and men, and God's strategy of men and women running fast and far together. May the mountains of DECEPTION and DOUBT be moved, in Jesus' name!

Key Verses for Prayer into Stronghold #4 – Slithering Deception and Deceit

Genesis 3:1, 4, 5

"Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?... You will not certainly die... For God knows...you will be like God."

Matthew 4:4, 7, 10

"It is written..." "It is written..." "Away from me, Satan! For it is written..."

Psalm 101:7

No one who practices deceit will dwell in my house; no one who speaks falsely will stand in my presence.

Isaiah 5:18

Woe to those who draw sin along with cords of deceit, and wickedness as with cart ropes.

Acts 13:10

You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?

Romans 3:13

Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips.

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Stronghold #5 – Tradition and Fear of Change

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Tradition and Fear of Change



“To be Syrian is to be Muslim.” “To be Bhutanese is to be Buddhist.” “India for the Hindus!”

Cultural identity and tradition run deep, especially in cultures that go back hundreds or thousands of years. In many of these worldviews, the enemy keeps people bound by beliefs and practices that do not acknowledge the Most High God or the standards of God’s kingdom. Tradition screams loudly, and people naturally resist change!

As Christians, it is easy to look at these traditions and immediately recognize the Enemy who wants to kill, steal, and destroy. The enemy wants to trap people in cultures of hopelessness and death. As a result, many traditions lead to destruction.

Consider:

- India's history of *seti* (living widows were burned on the cremation fire of their deceased husbands).
- "Honor killings" in the Middle East (women can be stoned/killed if the family has lost honor.)
- Prostitution in Southeast Asia (families intentionally send their daughter to the city to "work" and provide money for the family).
- Female genital mutilation (FGM/female circumcision) in African villages to insure fidelity.
- Foot-binding in China (taught that crippled female feet were beautiful and desirable).
- Rampant sexual immorality (devalues bodies and promotes abortion, government dependence, or cycles of poverty).
- Chest-binding on the rise in the U.S. (women compress their chests because of gender chaos.)

The enemy seeks to keep perverse practices culturally esteemed. *"That's just the way it is"* or *"This ensures faithfulness"* or *"This promotes beauty"* are powerful phrases that keep tradition (and destruction) going strong.

When brave followers of Christ work to stop barbaric practices, the resistance intensifies. *"Leave our culture alone!", "This is our tradition!", "Who are you to change our culture? This is how our ancestors practiced, and we honor them!", "Our spiritual leaders say it's okay.", "Are you saying that our grandparents were wrong?"* You can hear the pride, the fear, and the resistance.

Good Thing We Are Not So Bad...

Followers of Christ can agree that blatant injustices (like the ones listed above) are wrong/dishonorable. But what about our own traditions? Do any of our church traditions violate the ethics of God's kingdom? Do any of our traditions that seem so right hinder God's mission in the world? Do any of our traditions cause us to prefer one gender and devalue the other?

Consider:

- Can a godly, gifted woman preach?
- Who can pray aloud in your congregational church model? Who is asked to pray?
- Who baptizes new believers?
- Can anyone distribute the elements of communion?
- Are godly men and women given the same titles/votes/opportunities?

The enemy loves a Church guided by policies and practices that cut, cripple, and bind. Some churches, believing they are following God, needlessly limit godly women and say, *"That's just the way it is."* Or *"We value men and women equally, but women cannot serve as men can. But there are so many ways women can serve!"* These powerful phrases keep traditions going strong.

Ahh, even if the enemy cannot maim or kill them in the local church, he aims to shrivel women's influence, steal their dignity, divide God's laborers, and reduce their output and effectiveness. God wants people to create culture that lines up with His character, His standards. Jesus came preaching the kingdom of God and demonstrating its ethic. There are aspects of every culture that line up to God's kingdom culture, and there are aspects of every culture that violate God's kingdom culture. Local

churches also have practices that line up to God's kingdom culture, and probably have areas that contradict God's kingdom culture.

Origin and Destination

If you are a person more comfortable looking *back* fondly to the "ancient ways" of tradition, then consider that GOD'S ORIGINAL PLAN for men and women is "**even more ancient**" than any fallen human culture. God's design came before your childhood pastor, before your denomination, before your national heritage, before your religious traditions... God is the ORIGINAL foundation. If we love old traditions, then we MUST love God's design. *It came before everything!* And **God's design from the very beginning was for men and women to be side-by-side, shoulder-to-shoulder fulfilling the five commands of both Genesis 1:28 and Matthew 28:18-20!**

By contrast, if you love thinking about "future-possibilities," then consider that GOD'S ULTIMATE PLAN for men and women in his kingdom is more "future" and more "enduring" than any fallen culture! And of course, in God's eternal kingdom, will men rule over women? Will women rule over men? NO! Jesus had a simple and powerful battleplan against the demonic stronghold of tradition... know God's standard and live it out – even when God's kingdom culture runs counter-cultural to our own. The enemy wants happy, entertained, plump, inward-looking, comfort-seeking Christians who find satisfaction in traditions. The enemy wants timid Christians too passive and too afraid to take a bold stand for Jesus and his kingdom culture regarding men and women.

Pray God's people line up with God's character and live out God's kingdom! May the mountains of TRADITION and FEAR OF CHANGE be moved, in Jesus' name!

Key Verses for Prayer into Stronghold #5 – Tradition and Fear of Change

Matthew 15:2-3

"Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!" Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?"

Matthew 15:6-9

[You Pharisees say] they are not to 'honor their father or mother' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules."

John 11:48

If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation.

Acts 19:26-29

²⁶ And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. ²⁷ There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited; and the goddess herself, who is worshiped

throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.”²⁸ When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”²⁹ Soon the whole city was in an uproar.

Philippians 3:20-21

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Pursuing Partnership: Moving Mountains of Strongholds

Stronghold #6 – The Body and Immorality

by Drs. Leslie and Chad Seagraves

<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!

The Body and Immorality



Holiness and purity are spiritual weapons.

Men and women, how are you battling? Do you advance on offense with your righteous life and honorable choices? Do you play strong defense, vigilantly keeping watch over the gates of your eyes and ears?

Or... not?

May we as brothers and sisters in Christ battle the demonic stronghold of immorality with the weapons of holiness and purity.

The Body is Good!

God had the amazing idea to create people with bodies – male and female. Every part of the human body and mind, our senses, chemicals, and emotions sprang from the heart of a generous God. How creative

was God to design male and female human bodies out of literally nothing?! And with bodies came the blessings of oneness, and pleasure, and children. We should all pause and give thanks to God!

God created sex as a powerful and protective stronghold for our safety and flourishing. A godly “strong...hold” is a fortress that keeps our most precious things safe and keeps away enemies. God designed the stronghold of sex as a massive godly hug/embrace/hold. Within God’s boundaries, we and our loved ones are kept safe.

When God’s people think and act about sex in ways that honor God’s creative design, humanity flourishes. Singleness blesses the nations with speed and focus. Marriages demonstrate loving, Christlike unity. Children are born with joy and expectation. Societies grow with honorable laws and God-honoring justice.

Immorality

Satan hates God’s plan for our bodies. He works havoc, splitting the body and mind with a worldview called body-soul dualism. [Humanity is fragmented. The body is expendable. Only the mind counts as “your true self.” See *Love Thy Body* by Nancy Pearcey]. This destructive worldview pervades Western thought and serves as the source for much of today’s secular agenda that promotes sin such as hook-up culture, abortion, pornography, and transgenderism.

In addition, Satan wants to exploit and wreck the godly stronghold of sex. He seeks to gain access and build a kingdom run by his devious rules. Depravity creeps in... and individual lust is just the tip of the iceberg. Sex in the kingdom of darkness is used to pillage, demoralize, and devour. Satan also twists reality through self-hate, body mutilation, and gender confusion.

Paul exhorts believers in Ephesians 5:3, *“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.”* Yet, rates of pre-marital sex, extra-marital sex, living with boyfriends/girlfriends, and a host of other immoral actions compares almost equally between Christians and non-Christians. The statistics of Christian men and women (and Christian leaders) viewing pornography run close to the rates of non-Christians. Living in permissive and pleasure-seeking cultures, Christians’ unholy lifestyles must break the heart of God who gave us an awesome gift we choose to distort! We appeal to you, brothers and sisters, *Honor the Creator!*

God established purity, faithfulness, and personal holiness as spiritual weapons! May we train and use well these battle-ready weapons!

Some Gates Keep Women Out... Be Creative!

Troubling statistics reveal that many Christians fall into sexual sin. Yet, Satan has also used the *fear* of falling into sexual sin to prevent women from full participation in Church leadership. The concerned, “It’s just easier to have men-only” results in many doors shut for women. This limitation hurts the harvest and pleases the enemy.

Some use the “Billy Graham Rule” to protect themselves. With this rule, men pledge to never be alone with a woman other than their wives. We whole-heartedly agree that all believers (single, married, male,

and female) need to have strategies for our protection and accountability. But we must not use fear to shut out women from good and godly ministry. We must find creative solutions that advance the Gospel, without a *hint* of impropriety.

Personally, we do not meet with the opposite gender *one-on-one* (other than our spouse) over coffee or dessert or dinner for work meetings. We think of other options to get the job done and honor Christ, without limiting God's female laborers.

Sacred Siblings!

The Bible offers a fantastic solution to purity and propriety in the Church so that we walk in holiness since "*God is holy.*" The Apostle Paul said, "*Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity*" (1 Timothy 5:1-2).

The "Sister Model" and "Brother Model" answer so many questions.

- How should you treat and view women? Like your sister.
- How should you treat and view men? Like your brother.

Take some time and expand the thought, "Treat her like your sister." "Treat him like your brother." What does this practically mean?

Our kids have each modeled this well. Just the other day, our youngest had a doctor's appointment. Afterward, the medical staff let her choose three stickers. She carefully chose one for herself, one for her brother, and one for her sister. As a good sister, she did not just think of herself. She wanted her siblings to be part of the experience.

What if we as Christians battled with pure hearts as we navigated our work, our entertainment, our ministry, our conversations, and our decisions. The enemy would tremble! What if we treated one another as sacred siblings – honoring our Creator and God's image-bearers? The enemy would have no foothold, no stronghold!

Pray that believers will live with holiness, faithfulness, and purity as sacred siblings! May the mountain of IMMORALITY be moved, in Jesus' name!

Key Verses for Prayer into Stronghold #6 – The Body and Immorality

Ephesians 5:3

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.

1 Timothy 5:1-2

Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

Do you not know that you yourselves are God's temple, and that God's Spirit dwells in you?... for God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

1 Peter 1:14-16

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

Romans 6:11-14

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³ Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

Pursuing Partnership: Moving Mountains of Strongholds

Stronghold #7 – NOT Knowing When to STOP

by Drs. Leslie and Chad Seagraves

<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!

NOT Knowing When to STOP



“Women are the BEST!”, **“Men are HORRIBLE!”**, **“Men are BETTER because they were created first!”**, **“We are all the same!”**, **“Girl Power!”**

You’ve heard the screechy slogans and contradictory choruses ringing out across Western culture. They lead to separation, division, and at times hostility between men and women. We exaggerate, we overcompensate, we run right past God’s intent. We don’t know when or where to stop. The goal of this demonic stronghold is sinful polarization. Polarization between male and female began in Genesis 3, separating what God had joined together.

The God-Centered Compass

Let us plant an image in your mind – a swinging compass (like a 2-D pendulum, but in 3-D). At the center of this compass stands GOD’S PERFECT PLAN for men and women. This place of unwavering harmony is where people thrive, and God’s laborers multiply lasting fruit. In this place, Truth aligns with reality. Here we find men and women relating within a system centered on the kingdom of God and the character of the King. This is the aim... **godly mutual submission leading to godly unity, and gifted men and women serving as God intended, to let the world know.** Because it’s God’s idea, this kingdom ethic works!

Satan, of course HATES this God-centered plan of male and female harmony. Satan works to swing that compass needle somewhere – anywhere other than perfectly aligned with God’s plan.

This demonic stronghold pushes the pendulum to an exaggerated extreme. On one side we have “male-only leadership.” On another side we have “radical feminism.” On yet another side we have “androgyny/gender confusion.” The enemy loves deceiving and pushing people to embrace any extreme that misses God’s standard. And because Satan deceives, many Christians believe and function outside God’s centered kingdom and teach others to join them! It takes humility to recognize our personal location on this compass.

Extreme #1 – Machismo/Male-only Leadership

Here, women may be viewed as damsels in distress needing rescue or objects to be used. From this women-restricting view related to Christian ministry, you may have heard, *“Women teaching/ preaching/ leading is a ‘slippery slope’ to accepting homosexual behavior in the pulpit.”* Or *“Promoting women in leadership positions is like a camel getting its nose under the tent. Soon the whole camel is inside.”* Noooo... being a woman is not sinful, nor are women camels! God’s Word says that BOTH male and female are given the task of multiplying, filling, and ruling (Gen. 1:28). The Holy Spirit does NOT give gifts based on gender, and God *“looks at the HEART”* not *“outward appearance”* (1 Sam. 16:7).

Extreme #2 – Radical Feminism

You may have heard, *“Who needs a man!”* or *“No uterus, no opinion!”* or *“Men can sit and learn, but we don’t need your voices or thoughts!”* or *“Abortion rights on demand!”* Overcompensation against men can lead to swinging toward another sinful option. This side promotes radical feminism which sees no need for men. Those *without Christ* often vent anger and lop-sided logic, while demanding their “rights.” Christians on this spectrum may want to “throw out Paul!” or they are easily offended by those who don’t hold their view, creating division and offering only judgment – rather than grace or forgiveness! (As a side note, read up on “**first-wave** feminism.” You are one almost certainly. Includes: women’s right to vote, anti-slavery, pro-life. But 2nd, 3rd, and 4th waves of feminism have definite roots of evil, including abortion).

Extreme #3 – Androgyny/Gender Confusion

Taking it to another level of distortion, the compass swings to actually denying gender differentiation. With phrases such as *“Love is love”* or *“Jesus would include everyone,”* this demonically confused side denies biological reality, endorses or condones sin, distorts the biblical meaning of love, and blurs the clear standards God gives for our protection and flourishing.

Do Justice Biblically!

Injustice on one side can lead to foolish overcompensation on the other. Or it can lead to non-logic, confusion, bitterness, and pride. We must consistently walk in the humility of the Holy Spirit. Each of the exaggerated poles above rejects God’s standards for men and women in relationship. The enemy loves for people to declare themselves their own moral authority. God’s authoritative Word declares that both men and women are designed to serve together in God’s mission.

*God’s answer to machismo is not feminism. God’s answer to patriarchy is not matriarchy. God’s answer to confusion is not denial of biological reality. God’s answer for male and female is **mutual dominion which leads to powerful unity for witness.***

Jesus had a simple and powerful battleplan against this stronghold of “NOT knowing when to STOP.” When religious leaders asked Jesus about marriage, WHERE did Jesus point? The current 1st century standards? Patriarchy? Jewish tradition? Radical feminism? None of those! He pointed to God’s intent “*in the beginning*” (Matt. 19:4, 8). Jesus battled this stronghold not by making a polarized claim. Rather he called out people to follow God’s original plan – man and woman side-by-side and shoulder-to-shoulder, commissioned for the world. *Selah...*

Pray the compass needle of theology will swing rightly, straight down the middle of God’s truth, God’s character... and STOP there!

Key Verses for Prayer into Stronghold #7 – Knowing When to STOP

Genesis 2:1

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.

1 Samuel 16:7

But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

Matthew 19:8

Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.”

Romans 8:29

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

Matthew 6:33

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Pursuing Partnership: Moving Mountains of Strongholds

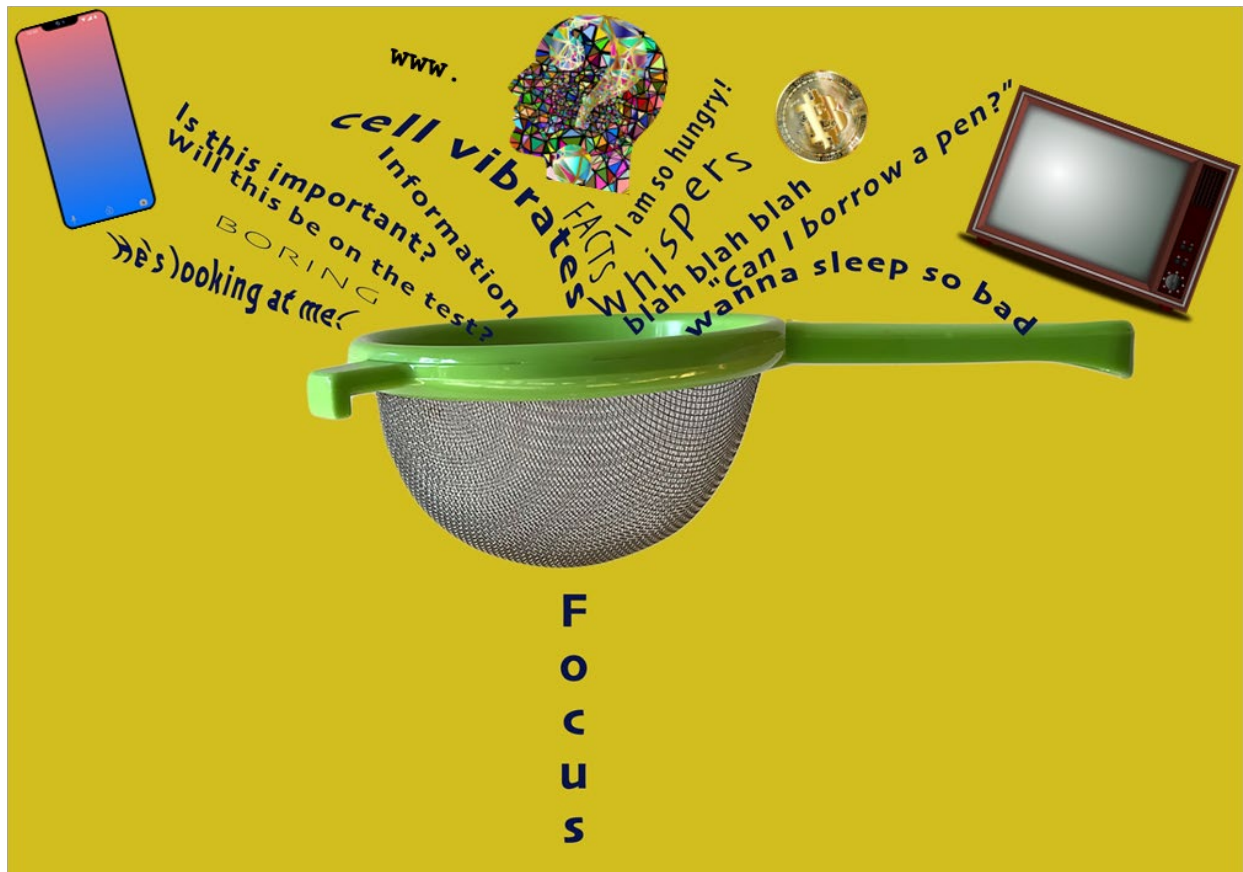
Stronghold #8 – Distraction

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.

Key Verses for Prayer into Stronghold #8 – Distraction

Matthew 9:36-38

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.'

2 Timothy 2:2

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.

Matthew 13:22-23

The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²³ But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

Hebrew 12:2-3

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Pursuing Partnership: Moving Mountains of Strongholds

Stronghold #9 – Distorted Power

by Drs. Leslie and Chad Seagraves

<https://servingshouldertoshoulder.com>

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Distorted Power



Expanded Family, Expanded Sharing

When our first child was born, she began jabbering with childlike expressions at the dinner table. When her younger brother arrived, he joined the kitchen table for meals. To make room for his infant banter, we all spoke a little less. When our last child came home from China, we placed her in the highchair. We never moved a loved one away. We simply grew. We shared the eating and talking space. And the conversation with each addition grew more robust and sweeter.

In much the same way, at God's kingdom's table, with each new brother or sister, we "share the power" of talking and listening.

Power can be used to bring good or demise to self and others. We see the theology of power woven throughout the pages of the Bible.

Genesis 1-2 – Power Shared

In Genesis 1-2, God revealed himself as the All-Powerful One. God created the man and woman in his image, and then empowered his creation – commanding both male and female to cultivate culture throughout the earth. Co-missioned side-by-side, they were (*ezer k'negedu*) equal strengths.

In short, God blessed both the man and woman with amazing *world dominion power!*

Genesis 3 – Power Violated

Satan hated that God shared power with humanity. In Genesis 3, humanity's sin distorted their shared power. Instead of mutual, outward-focused power to care for the world, they turned that power against one another. Man took the ruling power; women lost ruling power. God's initial command was marred, and all cultures have felt the loss through never-ending power struggles.

Jesus – Power Restored and Shared Again

The Jewish nation waited for a Messiah to deliver them from their oppressors. Instead, Jesus came to overthrow what binds *all* people – sin. Sin's power led to death, and death led to eternal destruction. So, Jesus came to take away the *power of sin*.

In Jesus' "upside-down kingdom," he modeled and taught how to give power away. Like God in the garden, Jesus empowered and commissioned his disciples to cast out demons, heal the sick, and preach repentance. Two-by-two they moved out in his power! After his resurrection, he again gave authority to the disciples (and us!) to "*make disciples of all nations*"! Jesus is the God who gives power away.

The Apostle Paul recognized the power of the cross and resurrection to impact relationships not just in eternity but also on earth.

Pause and consider the practical implications of this verse. How do Christians obey and put into practice Paul's theologically packed statement? Sadly today, a stronghold of abusive power AND deficient power remains among Christians. (Examine [scholarship](#) showing how Paul turned a Jewish prayer on its head!)

Gatekeepers and Hierarchy

Rather than allowing Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection to impact all human relationships, some Christians choose to act as gatekeepers who have bought into a hierarchical framework based on gender. Their framework endorses the full participation of men, while women are limited or excluded from using certain spiritual gifts. They interpret Galatians 3:28 both "essentially and practically" for the Jew/Gentile category and the Slave/Free category. But for the Male/Female category, they emphasize, "equal in essence, but unequal in function."

Missionary and author, David Hamilton (YWAM) stated, "*If we're preoccupied with maintaining our status, if we're trying to protect the privileges of some hierarchy taught by our particular culture, we are acting in a non-Christian way. These reactions are the opposite of the Gospel message.*" (*Why Not Women*, 2000:139).

May the Church raise up spiritually-gifted servants of godly character, not giving in to the pervasive stronghold of hoarding power or protecting the power of men alone!

Segmenting for Power

Rather than allowing Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection to impact all human relationships, some Christians have given into the secular view that society is divided into two categories – the “powerful Oppressors” and the “powerless Oppressed.”

This warped worldview is called Critical Theory, and it emerged from the ideology of Marxism. Critical Theory divides society along: race, class, gender, sexuality, physical ability, and age. Many promoters of CT seek to destroy the nuclear family and have embraced Marx's hatred of God and his standards. Reminder... Marxist ideology killed 100+ MILLION people in the last century!

Consider again, Galatians 3:28. Paul says that because of Jesus, ethnic division, economic division, and gender division (male and female) are finished. Yet, the enemy seeks to exploit our divisions (into warring tribes), while Jesus' kingdom aims for unity, love, and peace.

Don't Underestimate the Power of the Cross

Power-hoarders and divisive conflict-creators, please repent. These worldviews of power are not the way of Jesus. These paths will not endure. Remember, in humility Jesus defeated death and destroyed the power of sin over redeemed humanity. If Jesus, the Almighty God, is willing to empower others and provide oneness, we should follow.

[May Christians choose to *empower* others as a reflection of our ALL-POWERFUL Savior who shares power.](#)

Key Verses for Prayer into Stronghold #9 – Distorted Power

Genesis 1:28

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Deuteronomy 8:16-18

He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you.¹⁷ You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.”¹⁸ But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.

Mark 10:45

The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Galatians 3:28

There is neither Jew nor Gentile (ethnic division), neither slave nor free (economic division), neither male nor female (gender division), for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Romans 12:10

Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.

Pursuing Partnership: Moving Mountains of Strongholds

Stronghold #10 – Invisibility

By Drs. Leslie and Chad Seagraves

<https://servingshouldertoshoulder.com>

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Invisibility



Shine Everywhere or Shrink

Jesus called forward a demonically bent and crippled woman to the front of the synagogue. The crowd was shocked! There, he called her *“daughter of Abraham”* and publicly restored her. The leaders were indignant! The woman was set free. The leaders were humiliated. The crowd was delighted! May we be like Jesus and call women forward, bless them with identity, and release them to praise God publicly.

God created men and women to “fill the earth” and shine as a city on a hill within every sphere of society. The enemy hates the idea of godly workers boldly spreading out. He prefers that they do the exact opposite... shrink back in the shadows. In Satan’s war against God, the enemy wants women to have zero influence, to disappear and remain invisible.

Out of Sight...

Cultures throughout the world have devalued women and sought to keep them hidden. Pick a culture, any culture:

- In the ancient Greek culture, *“the ‘unknown woman’ was considered the ideal woman.”*
- In 1st century Roman culture, women had no individual name; she took the feminine form of her dad’s name.
- The Jewish Talmud stated, *“The birth of a daughter is a loss,”* and Jewish women gained social value only if they sent their sons to the synagogue.
- Hinduism teaches in the Rig Veda, *“There cannot be any friendship with a woman. Her heart is more cruel than ‘heyna.’”*
- Modern women of Iran and the Gulf States drape themselves in hot black burqas, veiling their faces “for their honor.” A woman of Afghanistan shared that her greatest dream was to *“feel the wind blowing through my hair.”*
- In Pakistan, women are considered “the honor.” And, *“we protect our honor by keeping them at home.”*

Women throughout the world are hidden within house walls, prisoners of their families. Though education has changed the landscape in recent decades, we all sigh with sadness at the realities that billions of women and girls still endure. Yet...

Has the Church influenced culture, or has culture influenced the Church?

A highly-educated Indian woman who worked in the national government proclaimed in despair:

“When I come home, I am nobody! And I am silenced in my church! I would have given my life to serve the church, but I am not allowed to speak.”

I (Leslie) attended a global conference in Indonesia without Chad. I was riding the bus back to the airport. A man from Colorado asked about our ministry. After I shared a bit, he responded, *“So, what are your husband’s spiritual gifts that enable him to do this?”*

I felt what so many women feel like outside and inside the Church – **invisible**.

And Satan LOVES it! An “invisible” woman may be seen physically, but she is overlooked or considered unnecessary in matters of significance.

Sometimes when teaching, we share how God created the woman from the man’s “side” as his equal strength – *ezer k’negedu*. Then we illustrate God’s intent in the creation of woman:

- Not from man’s head – that she would rule over him.
- Not from man’s foot – that he might rule over her.
- Not from man’s chest – that he might hide in back.
- Not from man’s back – so that she cannot be seen.
- From his side! Close to his heart. Aimed in the same direction, and equally visible.

Structural Barriers – Lack of Models

Throughout the global Church, there remain comparatively few examples showing women in leadership. Those that do serve in leadership often receive no affirmation. This “lack of model” is an invisibility framework. It causes both men and women to ignore or not honor God’s daughters.

Men, who rarely see the example of godly female leaders, easily assume that women do not want to serve in certain positions. One pastor shared, *“Women don’t want to be elders. They never ask. They wouldn’t want that responsibility.”* We responded, *“Have you asked them? Maybe they don’t know the position is open for them because they never see women serving in that capacity.”* (See [scholarship](#) regarding the neuter pronoun “tis.”)

Women, seldom seeing other women leaders, quickly understand that service through leading and teaching/speaking may not be an option available for them in the church. An American woman said, *“Sundays are the saddest days of my life. I feel unneeded and of little value when I walk into church.”*

An Indian church planter who now equips and releases both women and men as church planters and leaders stated:

“God literally opened our eyes to this. If we want to impact the world around us, we need to use every possible resource. And the cashless resource that is available in the kingdom of God is the laborers. That’s what Jesus expressed. [Women are] more than 50% of God’s Army! We need to give our sisters... opportunity like we give the men, opportunity to serve the Lord.”

To strike a deathblow to this stronghold of **invisibility**, it will require faith and courage:

- Men must be willing to invite godly, spiritually-gifted women to rise to the task and fill positions of leadership, so God’s laborers might lead based on their giftedness.
- Women must be willing to step up and become the example for others to see, so that more women will think of themselves serving in a similar fashion.
- The Church must publicly honor both women and men who engage in God’s mission. Highlighting their ministry contributions works to shatter Satan’s plan of invisibility.

May we move out and fill the earth, fulfilling God’s intention with both male and female shining brightly in God’s kingdom.

Key Verses for Prayer into Stronghold #10 – Invisibility

Genesis 2:21-22

So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. ²²Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man,

Luke 13:12-16

When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.” ¹³Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God... “You hypocrites...should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?”

2 Chronicles 16:9

For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.

Genesis 16:13

[Hagar] gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me."

Matthew 5:14

You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.

Pursuing Partnership: Moving Mountains of Strongholds

Stronghold #11 – Confusion and Gymnastics

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Confusion and Gymnastics



The Enemy Loves Distortion

“God is not a God of disorder but of peace...” But Satan loves chaos. Therefore, he tries to confuse Christians as they interpret the Bible by introducing contorted gymnastics. He confounds Christians, causing poor interpretations and inconsistent practices that do not reflect the character of God.

God’s Word continues to speak to all generations and nations. Because God’s character does not bend with culture, God’s Word is *“useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”* (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The enemy hates when Christians understand God’s Word and *“rightly divide the word of truth”* (2 Tim. 2:15). When we rightly divide God’s Word, a consistency should flow in the way we interpret and apply the biblical text. Listen to some common gymnastics implying that God changes his standards based on culture.

- “No men stepped up, that’s why God chose Deborah as judge.” (See Judges 4-5.) Consistency says, God approved of Deborah; God did NOT violate his standards to win a war!
- “Too few men were Christians, so that’s why Lydia started a church in her home.” (See Acts 16.) Consistency says, God is pleased when men or women make disciples and start house churches!
- “Women can preach, but they cannot stand behind the pulpit.” Consistency says, there is no pulpit in the Bible!
- “Women can never teach men biblical content. So, women can only instruct boys until age 14.” Consistency says, Jesus never put an age limit on disciple-making.

The ideas above reveal subtle (or blunt) uses of gymnastics – adding, twisting, maneuvering texts to arrive at our *pre-set* conclusions. This does not exhibit sound exegesis.

Consider another biblical passage. Many Christians say women shouldn’t preach in church, and they may quote 1 Cor. 14:35, “*It is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.*” Yet, in their church gatherings, women sing, give testimonies, make announcements, teach Sunday School classes, etc.

So... does God consider a woman’s voice “disgraceful” in the assembly or not? If women’s voices are disgraceful, then women should say NOTHING, teach NOTHING, and have NO CONVERSATIONS with anyone in the local church setting. The text clearly calls female speech “disgraceful.” Yet people misapply and say, “*That’s not what it means. It means women shouldn’t preach, teach, or hold the office as a pastor or elder. Of course they can talk or teach women!*” But where does this verse mention ANY of those things? Indeed, Paul must be forgetful because only three chapters earlier, he instructed women how to be modest WHEN they prayed and prophesied (1 Cor. 11:5-6). Do not let the enemy confuse and win. [Check out the New Testament research](#) indicating that Paul was strongly correcting an exact Corinthian phrase, not promoting a universal limitation of women!

High View of God and High View of Scripture

To not fall victim to Satan’s gymnastics, we must maintain a high view of *God* and a high view of *Scripture*. A.W. Tozer stated, “*The low view of God entertained... among Christians is the cause of a hundred lesser evils everywhere among us.*”

If we hold a high view of God and a high view of Scripture, then we can know that biblical consistency is not only possible, consistency matches God’s character. This view protects against enemy attack and helps us develop a solid theology around men and women, rather than have an ideology guided by human tradition that leads to mis-interpretation.

Universal and Culture-Specific Truth

One way we can guard from inconsistency in following Scriptures is to realize the Bible contains two distinct kinds of truth – “*universal truth*” and “*culture-specific truth.*” It takes godly wisdom to differentiate. *Universal truth* is true in every generation and situation. It does not change. *Culture-Specific truth* is true in certain places and times. It can vary based on its context. For example:

A certain man in a U.S. partnering church became irate because we equip women as church planters in Asia. Chad flew to their city and spoke with their team. He explained how the Apostle

Paul multiplied godly laborers and how God used women start and bless house churches. Yet, the influential man causing the conflict kept repeating his fixed interpretation.

At the end of the meeting, Chad added. *“Brothers, I am offended. No one greeted me with a kiss. You only shook my hands. Paul says, ‘Greet each other with a holy kiss.’ Scripture was disobeyed.”* They all looked at Chad, and Chad began to laugh. *“Thank you, for NO kiss! That’s my point. ‘Greet with a kiss’ is a local custom – not a universal truth. You have to figure out if a biblical command is universal or cultural, or you could promote false teaching.”*

The enemy wants Christians to twist, flip, and ultimately disobey God’s holy standards. May we battle well against this powerful enemy of God’s truth.

Pray Christians will understand and apply the Bible as God intended. May the stronghold of CONFUSION cease as people study the Word and as the Holy Spirit guides us into clear, unwavering truth.

Key Verses for Prayer into Stronghold #11 – Confusion and Gymnastics

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Psalm 56:5

All day long they twist my words; all their schemes are for my ruin.

2 Timothy 2:15

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

2 Corinthians 4:2

Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God.

2 Peter 3:16

[Paul’s] letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Pursuing Partnership: Moving Mountains of Strongholds
Stronghold #12 – Identity and “Roles”
by Drs. Leslie and Chad Segraves
<https://servingshouldertoshoulder.com>

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Identity and “Roles”



Aim for the Heart

“Does God love boys more than girls? That’s what boys said in my class today when we were studying Genesis.” – 9-year-old girl

Seeking a direct hit on the heart of females, the enemy aims to demolish the esteem of God's daughters. Even from the lips of 3rd graders in a Christian school, spiritual abuse raises its ugly head. Please recognize this statement for what it is – a mountainous attack of the enemy, striking at the center of a girl's identity.

The 9-year-old girl above learned that God created male first and that made them leaders, while female was created second, born to simply assist males in their callings. The teacher failed to inform her that God commanded and commissioned both to rule the earth together (Gen. 1:28). So, the boys simply concluded that *first* and *leader* meant "loved more"! (See [scholarship](#) examining the powerful Hebrew word *ezer* (*helper*).

May Jesus crumble this mountain that attacks the identity of God's deeply loved daughters.

"Equal but Different"

Adult theologians have also constructed formulas which easily lead to the same conclusion as these "child theologians."

In his doctorate studies, Chad conducted research among Muslims and Christians. He asked, "How would you describe the relationship between men and women? Are they equally or unequally ranked?" Interestingly, both gave the SAME answer!

- Christian theologians stated: *"They are equal, but different in function."*
- Muslim imams stated: *"They are equal, but men are one degree above."*

Islamic and Christian leaders basically agreed to the same formula... male and female are equal in nature, but there remains a "separation," and men remain on top. These common phrases go far beyond the 3rd grade classroom. They are preached from the pulpit, broadcast in media, and expanded in massive numbers of Christian books. "Equal but different" has become such a concise and normalized part of our worldview that many do not recognize it as an attack from the enemy. How is that?

Redefining Terms: Different and Roles

You've probably heard many times that women and men are "equal" as humans – in their nature, their essence, their "being." This is true, since both are made in God's image.

But then comes the shift and the re-definition. Theologians changed the meanings of two key words – *different* and *role*.

Before the 1960's, all theological commentaries taught that men were created first and were *superior*, while women were created second and were *inferior*. That was just the way things were! But, in response to the Women's Rights Movement, the Sexual Revolution, birth control, abortion rights, and the social upheaval caused by these forces, Christian theologians realized that they needed to change their vocabulary to remain relevant. It simply was no longer acceptable to say, "Women are inferior to men."

Then in 1977, the book *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women* gave hierarchical Christians new terminology... "*Men and women are equal in **essence**, but different in **role**."* Voila! Women were NOT subordinate in *nature* or *being*, but they WERE subordinate in *role*, *function*, and

authority. Soon, theologians *identified* roles, *ranked* roles, and *closed* certain roles to women. They made female role subordination *permanent*, and many based it on the Trinity to gain support!

Different came to mean “unequal,” rather than simply distinct. *Role* came to mean “a fixed, permanent position,” rather than an interchangeable function (like in acting or in household chores, i.e. “Whose *role* is it to wash dishes?”)

Forget spiritual giftedness, determined by the Holy Spirit. Never mind the need for multiplied laborers in the Great Commission. Ignore godly character, personality, and experience. Hierarchical theologians now had the vocabulary. Men lead and take charge. It’s their permanent *role*. Women follow and help. It’s their fixed *role* forever.

Five Punches

The enemy smiles as the Church promotes pride, limits laborers, and makes God look bad. Notice five key attacks by the enemy based on our identity as “equal but different.”

1. Men lost their co-equal partner that God intended.
2. Women lost their place to rule alongside men.
3. Non-Christians remain in darkness as fewer Gospel harvesters go out.
4. God’s image is marred with a bad reflection by his image bearers.
5. God’s character looks bad if he intended such a disunified arrangement.

Pray the Church will recognize the harmful impacts of this theology and work to set it right.

Theology vs. Ideology

Our understanding of male and female MUST be grounded in Scripture from Genesis to Revelation! If it is not, we will fall into ideologies that do not align with the kingdom of God. We know we have an ideology, rather than a theology, when we speak inconsistently on the passages regarding men and women, when we add to the text to push an agenda, when we refuse to consider the character and godliness of the people in question.

- “I will never associate with a church with a trace of misogyny in it.” Ideology
- “We will never allow any woman to preach.” Ideology
- “We only allow gifted and godly men and women to lead.” Theology

It’s not that hard to recognize!

May attacks on the IDENTITY of women based on faulty understanding of ROLES be demolished. And may every woman realize her value given by God and walk in her purpose as fitting a redeemed daughter and ambassador of the Almighty God!

Key Verses for Prayer into Stronghold #12 – Identity and “Roles”

Genesis 1:27-28

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the [creation].

1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Revelation 1:5-6

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

2 Corinthians 5:16-20

¹⁶So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.

Revelation 22:5

There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And THEY will reign for ever and ever.

Overview into Stronghold Scriptures: Verses to Pray for Men and Women

Stronghold #1 Hatred of Women

Genesis 3:15

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.

1 John 3:8

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

Revelation 9:11

They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek is Apollyon (that is, Destroyer).

2 Timothy 1:7

For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

Stronghold #2 Independence

Genesis 2:23-24

The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Genesis 1:28

God blessed THEM and said to THEM, 'Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue it, rule over [creation]'

John 17:23

I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Stronghold #3 Pride

James 4:6

God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Proverbs 8:3

To fear the Lord is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech.

Proverbs 16:18

Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

Daniel 4:37

Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

1 John 2:16

For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.

Stronghold #4**Slithering Deception and Deceit****Genesis 3:1, 4, 5**

“Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?... You will not certainly die... For God knows...you will be like God.”

Matthew 4:4, 7, 10

“It is written...” “It is written...” “Away from me, Satan! For it is written...”

Psalm 101:7

No one who practices deceit will dwell in my house; no one who speaks falsely will stand in my presence.

Isaiah 5:18

Woe to those who draw sin along with cords of deceit, and wickedness as with cart ropes.

Acts 13:10

You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?

Romans 3:13

Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips.

Stronghold #5**Tradition and Fear of Change****Matthew 15:2-3**

“Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!” Jesus replied, “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?”

Matthew 15:6-9

they are not to ‘honor their father or mother’ with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:

“‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.’”

John 11:48

If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation.

Acts 19:26-29

²⁶And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at

all. ²⁷There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited; and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.” ²⁸When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” ²⁹Soon the whole city was in an uproar.

Philippians 3:20-21

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Stronghold #6 The Body and Immorality

Ephesians 5:3

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.

1 Timothy 5:1-2

Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

Do you not know that you yourselves are God’s temple, and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?... for God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.

1 Peter 1:14-16

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

Romans 6:11-14

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹²Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. ¹⁴For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

Stronghold #7 Knowing When to STOP

Genesis 2:1

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.

1 Samuel 16:7

But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

Matthew 19:8

Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.”

Romans 8:29

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

Matthew 6:33

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Stronghold #8**Distraction****Matthew 9:36-38**

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.'

2 Timothy 2:2

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.

Matthew 13:22-23

The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.²³ But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

Hebrew 12:2-3

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Stronghold #9**Distorted Power****Genesis 1:28**

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Deuteronomy 8:16-18

He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you.¹⁷ You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me."¹⁸ But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.

Mark 10:45

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Galatians 3:28

There is neither Jew nor Gentile (ethnic division), neither slave nor free (economic division), neither male nor female (gender division), for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Romans 12:10

Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.

Stronghold #10

Invisibility

Genesis 2:21-22

So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. ²²Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man,

Luke 13:12-16

When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." ¹³Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God... "You hypocrites...should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"

2 Chronicles 16:9

For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.

Genesis 16:13

[Hagar] gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me."

Matthew 5:14

You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.

Stronghold #11

Confusion and Gymnastics

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Psalms 56:5

All day long they twist my words; all their schemes are for my ruin.

2 Timothy 2:15

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

2 Corinthians 4:2

Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

2 Peter 3:16

[Paul's] letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Stronghold #12 **Identity and "Roles"**

Genesis 1:27-28

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the [creation].

1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Revelation 1:5-6

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

2 Corinthians 5:16-20

¹⁶So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.

Revelation 22:5

There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And THEY will reign for ever and ever.