

COMMITMENT #15

A STRONG CHURCH IS SHARING STRENGTH WITH AND RECEIVING STRENGTH FROM OTHERS IN THE CITY/AREA/WORLD TOWARDS GOSPEL SATURATION.

"I am not asking on behalf of these alone, but also for those who believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one; just as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me." —John 17:20-21 NASB

DEFINITION

Strong churches know that the local church is God's means for bringing gospel saturation to the places God sends us (Eph 1:22-23; Col 1:27). They are compelled by Jesus' comprehensive vision (i.e. every man, woman, and child) until we see the knowledge of the glory of God cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Hab 2:14). They desire to actively express the answer to Jesus' high priestly prayer for unity in the church (John 17:20-23). They know that owning the lostness of their city and area will never be accomplished by a single church. Soma Area's partner with one another for: connection, prayer, growth, the strengthening of each church each year, and leader health. Soma churches in a Strong Area partner with Saturate and other organizations to see Saturate Hubs established in key cities. A Saturate Hub builds trust and unity in a city, supports the convening leaders to build city-reaching infrastructure around: prayer, leadership health, disciple-making strategies, church planting, and the common good towards gospel saturation.

QUOTES TO PONDER

What is common to many is taken least care of, for all men have greater regard of what is their own than for what they possess in common with others. — Aristotle

We are currently the most divided faith group on earth, and there isn't a close second. We have thousands of denominations and ministries, each believing their theology or methodology is superior.... The saddest part of this is that our Savior was crucified to end our divisions, commands us to be united, and says we will impact the world when we become one. We have forgotten how our divisions affect God and an unbelieving world. —Francis Chan

Jesus has said that when we become perfectly one, the world will believe that Jesus was sent by God and that God loves the world even as He loves His Son. And so, no matter how hard or illogical or uncomfortable it gets, we can't quit pursuing this. —Francis Chan

Do the lost people in my city know that the Father has sent the Son by the way that the church is united? —Will Plitt

The Church as a whole will not get healthy until the gifts that have been given for the equipping of the Church are recognized, and she won't grow up into maturity until the gifts have been realized that are given for building up the church in a city. —Jeff Vanderstelt



Jesus prays in John 17:22, “The glory which you have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one.” Glory is the full reality of something. The world sees the true nature of God by seeing the unity of the Church. If we are not operating as one Church in the city, we are not able to truly display the glory of God faithfully.... [T]he message we preach is being undermined by the activities we engage in that are divisive. —Jeff Vanderstelt

BIBLE STUDY

Read John 17:20-23, Mark 12:28-31, and Ephesians 4:1-6.

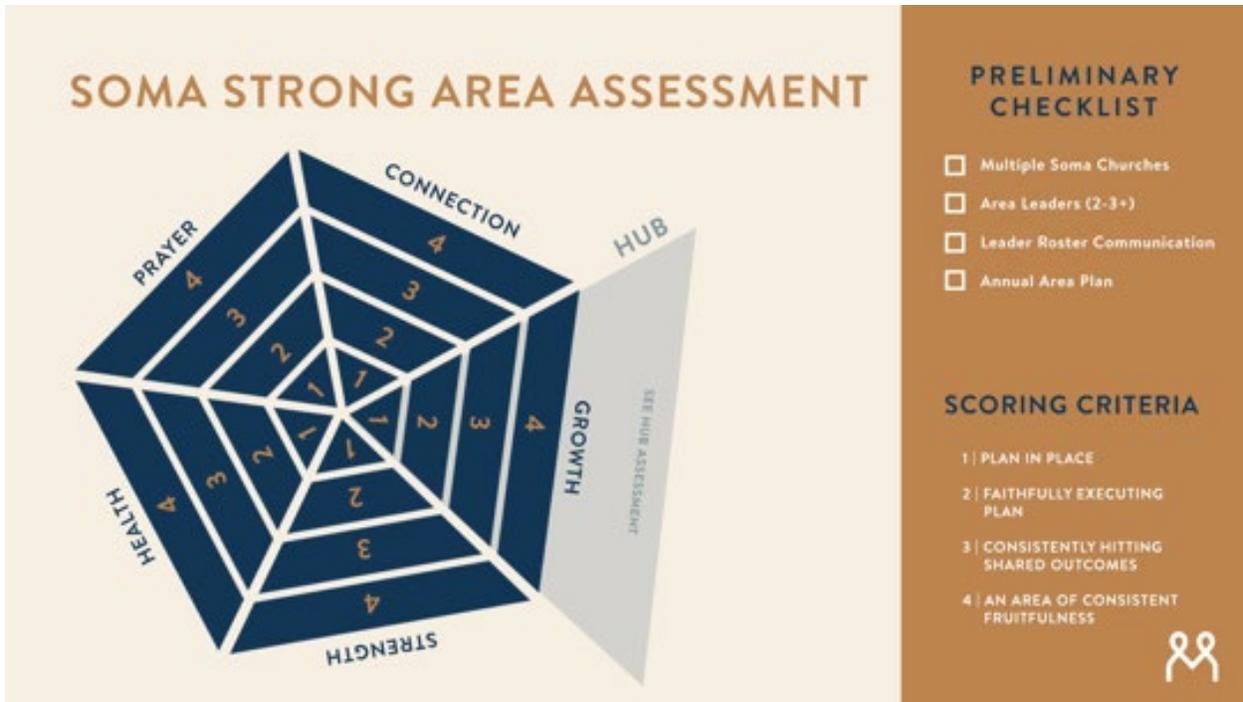
What do we learn about unity by studying Jesus’ prayer for the church? Do you believe unity is only required within a single local church, or is it broader? Does it include churches being unified with other churches? Why or why not? What is the result when Jesus’ prayer is not realized through disunity in a city, area, or country?

Ephesians 4:2-3 reads, “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” What role do you think humility and gentleness have in unity? How does patience and effort relate to unity? Who are the Christians you’re most likely to pridefully look down on? Who are the Christians you struggle to be patient with?

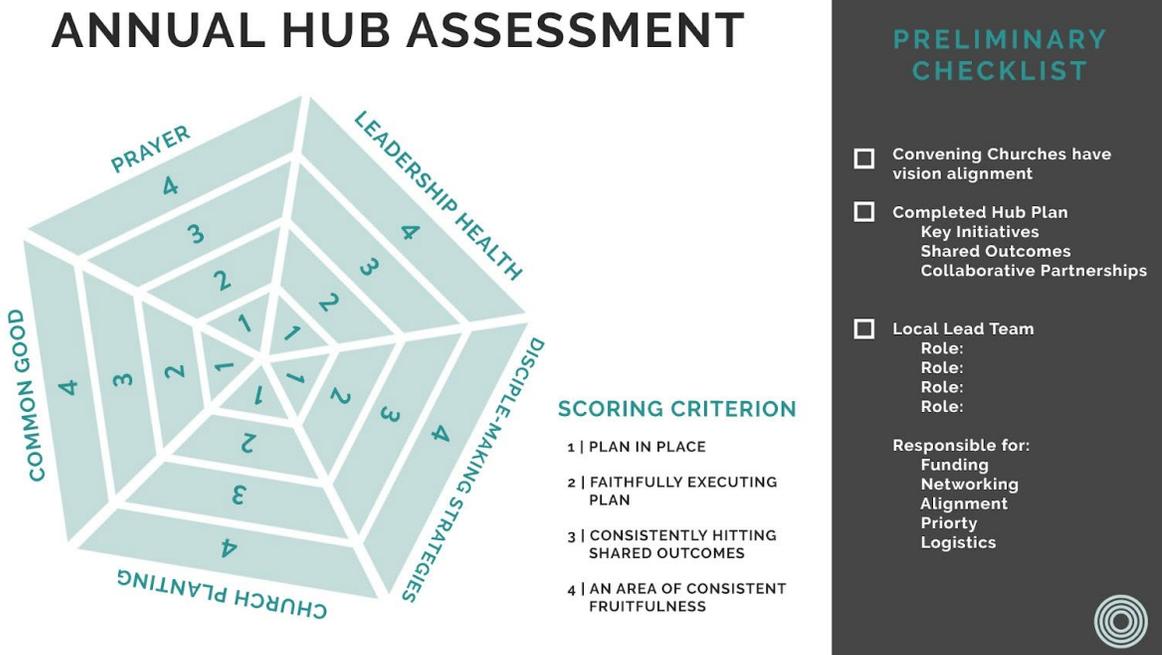
If there is only one LORD, one faith, one baptism, why are we known for our differentiation? To what extent do you think “marketing differentiation” has crept into the church (i.e. Marketing Differentiation theory holds that our value comes from how we’re different [or “better”] than “the competition”)? What impact does this have on the gospel’s advance?

As a point of clarity, the following image is the mental model Soma Area Leaders use to prayerfully develop plans for advancing gospel saturation within a given Soma Area (e.g. the Pacific Northwest, the Northeast, Mexico, etc.). Ask your Area Leader to share the annual plan for pursuing consistent fruitfulness in each of these commitments.





This next image is the mental model collaborative leaders in key cities use to prayerfully develop plans for advancing gospel saturation within a key city (e.g. Seattle, Charlestown, Monterrey, Mexico, etc.). Ask your Area Leader to share more about which key city or cities are in view within your Soma Area.



QUESTIONS FOR ASSESSMENT

Connection: Who are you already most connected to within your Soma Area or city? How often do you connect, and what level of trust is currently there? Have you connected with your Soma Area Leader to gain awareness about opportunities to give and receive within your Soma Area?

Growth: Do you know of church planters or other ministry leaders who would benefit from attending a Soma School? Do you know of planters who should consider a Regional Residency? Do you know of other churches who embody the Soma Distinctives who might consider the Soma Adoption Process?

Strengthening: Have you and your Area Leader(s) discussed what ongoing strengthening needs your church has? Have you identified strengths in your church and how they might be deployed to serve other churches in your city/area?

Health: What policies and practices does your church have in place to invest in leader health (vacation time, sabbatical, counseling support, etc.)? Are you aware of any Strong Leader opportunities that are currently available in your Soma area?

Prayer: How will you partner in prayer with your Soma Area and any potential Hub cities?

Saturate Hub Vision: Are you currently aware of which city in your Area is being established as a Saturate Hub? What Common Good organizations are already established and trusted in your city? Are you currently partnering with other churches or nonprofits in doing justice in your city/area? What issues/needs are being addressed well? Where is there more work to be done?

What other insights would be helpful to better understand this area in your church?



COMMITTED TO ACTION

What's one thing you or your team could do this week to strengthen this area?

What would it take to see this commitment strengthened over the next year?



CONCLUSION

While this is the completion of the Strong Church Workbook, it's not the end. This wasn't the beginning either. You will continue "always being reformed" as the Spirit leads your church. You've been working on this since your church was planted. You've been faithful while pursuing greater faithfulness. By God's grace, you've produced much fruit and will continue to pursue greater fruitfulness.

Now that your Soma coach and Area Leader(s) have greater clarity on the strengths your church brings to the Soma Family, strengths God has specifically graced your church with, we are better able to facilitate the collective strengthening towards gospel saturation. Your Area Leaders will call on you to serve others in the city, area, and the world. They will also continue to be attentive to areas that still require extra development in your church as we remain committed to seeing every Soma church strengthened year after year. I would encourage you to ask your Area Leader, "What does full engagement in the Soma Family look like?" and then do that wholeheartedly as a leadership team.

It is sometimes difficult to imagine what something will be decades from now. We implement vision and strategy. We wait and nothing impressive happens. We're tempted to look for new vision, or more likely, for new strategies. What if your church is more or less faithful? What if faithfulness looks more normal than extraordinary much of the time? What if it takes longer than we first imagined?

Steve Garber asks a critical question for our consideration: "How do you keep at the things that matter over time?"

The Soma Family is committed to helping you do just that. Jesus is worthy of our long-term attention span around the things He cares about.

