

INTRODUCTION

Within the Soma Family of Churches, relationships with one another are vital. We work together to plant churches, ensure leader and church health, and share our strengths with each other towards gospel saturation. You've come to understand what it means to be Soma. You've walked through the overview of the Soma Adoption process and decided to move forward as a unified elder team. You've been assigned a sponsor church and a coach.

Welcome!

You are now officially entering into + **PHASE 2 // ADOPTION COACHING.**

WHAT SHARED OUTCOMES WILL WE PURSUE?

The Strong Church Process is the official adoption coaching onramp into the Soma Family of Churches. It is designed to assist you, a church elder or leader, in gaining holistic clarity about the state of your church. You will be coached to build action plans to continue the strengthening of your church in fifteen key commitments of a biblical church. Together, you and your coach will aim to:

- Engage your vocation as an elder/leader, practicing holistic oversight.
- Strengthen your church towards greater fruitfulness.
- Get to know Soma leaders as Soma leaders get to know you and your church.
- Work “on” the church when week-to-week inertia often pulls you to forever work “in” the church.
- Keep the “whole” in mind as you work on the “individual” commitments (i.e. keep an eye on balanced priorities and appropriate pacing instead of "robbing Peter to pay Paul").
- Submit to any other insights or direction the Holy Spirit gives you along the way.

HOW TO USE THE STRONG CHURCH VIDEOS & WORKBOOK

The Strong Church videos and workbook are designed to be used by elders and leaders who have oversight for the church as a whole. They're intended to take a leadership team through a holistic audit of fifteen key commitments in a strong New Testament church. While other members of the church might benefit from this process, these assessment questions require a high-level understanding of the church. Moreover, the action steps are intended to be implemented by those with authority to do so within a local church.

Any process can be misunderstood. The Strong Church Process is intended to create clarity, not to replace the Holy Spirit. The worst thing you could do is to use this process as a prayer replacement. The



next worst thing you could do is to use it as a new law that you hold over the heads of believers and leaders. It would also be unhelpful if you use this process as an exercise in self-loathing or comparison. This process was not designed to morbidly shine light on the inadequacies in you, your leaders, or your efforts towards gospel advance. The Strong Church Process exists to guide you and your team as you prayerfully determine the next steps towards greater faithfulness and fruitfulness.

THE STRENGTHENING PROCESS

No church is strong in all fifteen commitments, so you should expect to slow down at various points in the process to work on areas of growth with your coach. Remember, this is not a bureaucratic process to appease Soma. Although we will be getting to know one another during this process, it's not a job interview. And, it's not a box to check off. It's an intentional process to strengthen your church. Because God has entrusted you as an elder with the care of His sheep, we implore you to take all the time you need to see your church strengthened around these central commitments.

WHY CALL THEM “COMMITMENTS”?

These fifteen commitments of a Strong Church are not boxes we check or leave unchecked. They are an attempt to define a holistic New Testament ecclesiology. These are commitments you've been working on and will continue to work on. These are commitments you are committed to, however difficult, however long it takes. This is about faithfully leading God's people by God's power into God's purposes. We are committed to these things because in the Scriptures we learn that God is committed to these things. These commitments are dynamic, not static. A strength can atrophy into a weakness. A weakness rightly addressed can grow into a strength.

We are trying to more faithfully embody God's intention for His Church in the world in our generation, but these cannot be mere intentions. Eugene Peterson reminds us, “Intentions must mature into commitments if we are to become persons with definition, with character, with substance” (*Run With the Horses*, p. 161). When committed, we move to action to ensure our love is not in word only but also in deed. We seek to be diligent in our work, motivated by our love for Jesus, His people, and the places He is sending us. We are committed to these things because Jesus is committed to His Church becoming all she can be for the world and His glory.

WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF A STRONG CHURCH?

A Strong Church is...

1. Founded on Christ and the Apostles' teaching (pg. 6)
2. Consistently reinforced by a clear, theological vision throughout the culture. (pg. 9)
3. Growing in Spirit-dependence and corporate prayer. (pg. 12)



4. Equipped, accountable, and fervent in reaching not-yet-believers through corporate and personal evangelism. (pg. 15)
5. Developing an increasingly godly, diverse, and competent leadership core. (pg. 18)
6. Contextualized and diverse, reflecting the community where it's planted. (pg. 22)
7. Multiplying communities of disciples who know how to be with Jesus, are becoming like Jesus, and making disciples like Jesus in the everyday stuff of life. (pg. 26)
8. Exalting Christ and equipping the saints in regular worship gatherings built on robust gospel liturgies. (pg. 30)
9. Equipping parents and creating environments for children and youth discipleship. (pg. 36)
10. Doing justice and remembering the poor. (pg. 39)
11. Led well by biblically qualified elders. (pg. 41)
12. Served well by biblically qualified deacons. (pg. 45)
13. Financially sustained, responsible, and generous. (pg. 49)
14. "Always being reformed" in pursuit of greater faithfulness and fruitfulness. (pg. 52)
15. Sharing strength with and receiving strength from others in the city/area/world towards gospel saturation. (pg. 55)

PRE-WORK FOR EACH SESSION

Each elder/leader will watch the video training for the next Strong Church commitment.

- **Option #1:** Plan to have your elder team meet a few days before your coaching time to collectively work through the companion Strong Church Workbook (one commitment per coaching session), processing the quotes, Bible study, and assessment questions for each commitment. This will enable your team to arrive at a consensus before the scheduled meeting with your coach.
- **Option #2:** Individual elders complete the companion Strong Church Workbook (one commitment per coaching session), processing the quotes, Bible study, and assessment questions for each commitment.
- While collective processing at the elder level (Option #1) is ideal, we know that busy schedules often cause conflicts. Yet, because we don't want the challenge of scheduling a pre-meeting with the elder team to stall the process, we understand this process may require some combination of the above two options. Record written responses to each session's content from the Strong Church Workbook in the Google Form attached to the page for each commitment.



These responses will be based on personal/team reflection in the pre-meeting time interval. A few thoughts on how to approach the assessment questions:

- Resist the temptation to blow through the content quickly. Take your time. This is not a case study in graduate school. In the busyness of the week-to-week, take this rare invitation to reflectively engage your role and responsibility as an elder/leader.
- You are working “on” the church, not “in” the church. Gain a 30,000-foot perspective on the whole. Approach each commitment prayerfully. Reflect on the assessment questions at different times within the same week.
- Form a hypothesis around how each given commitment is expressed currently. Test the hypothesis. Talk to God about it, remembering you have access to the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16). Ask Jesus, “What do you know about this that you want me to know?” Listen and record your reflections.

Come prepared to discuss each Strong Church commitment with your Soma coach during your scheduled coaching time. Your Soma coach will facilitate each session.

Your Soma coach will lead you to:

- **Connect** - How are you doing? Share an update on your past “Committed to Action” next steps.
- **Content** - Briefly articulate this session’s commitment (e.g. Commitment #10: Doing justice and remembering the poor) before hitting the high points and drawing out your insights and reflections from the video, quotes, Bible study, and assessment questions.
- **Expand Awareness** - What is important to know about this commitment as it currently functions in your church?
- **Committed to Action** - What should you do?
 - S.M.A.R.T - (Specific. Measurable. Attainable. Relevant. Time-Limited.)
 - Next Action: (immediate/short-term win)
 - Next Action: (over the next year for deep strengthening)
- Memorialize learnings by **sharing highlights**. What would you like to remember from this time today?

After you complete the first eight commitments, your team will do a “midpoint check-in” with your coach, sponsor church, and Soma area team member. Think of this as a breather, a time to consolidate learnings, review the process so far, discuss your church’s strengths and growth areas, answer questions, and clarify where needed, etc. This is also an opportunity to ensure unity around continuing the process.

Once your church’s elders/leaders and Soma leaders are aligned, complete the final seven commitments.



Upon completion of the Strong Church process:

- Work with your coach and Soma Area Leader to create an action plan to continue strengthening each commitment or to deploy your strength to serve other disciples, Soma churches, and Saturate Hub efforts. Your coach can also help identify resources and equipping opportunities to both develop and deploy strengths.
- Your coach will reach out to Michelle Thompson to schedule the on-site Adoption Assessment.

