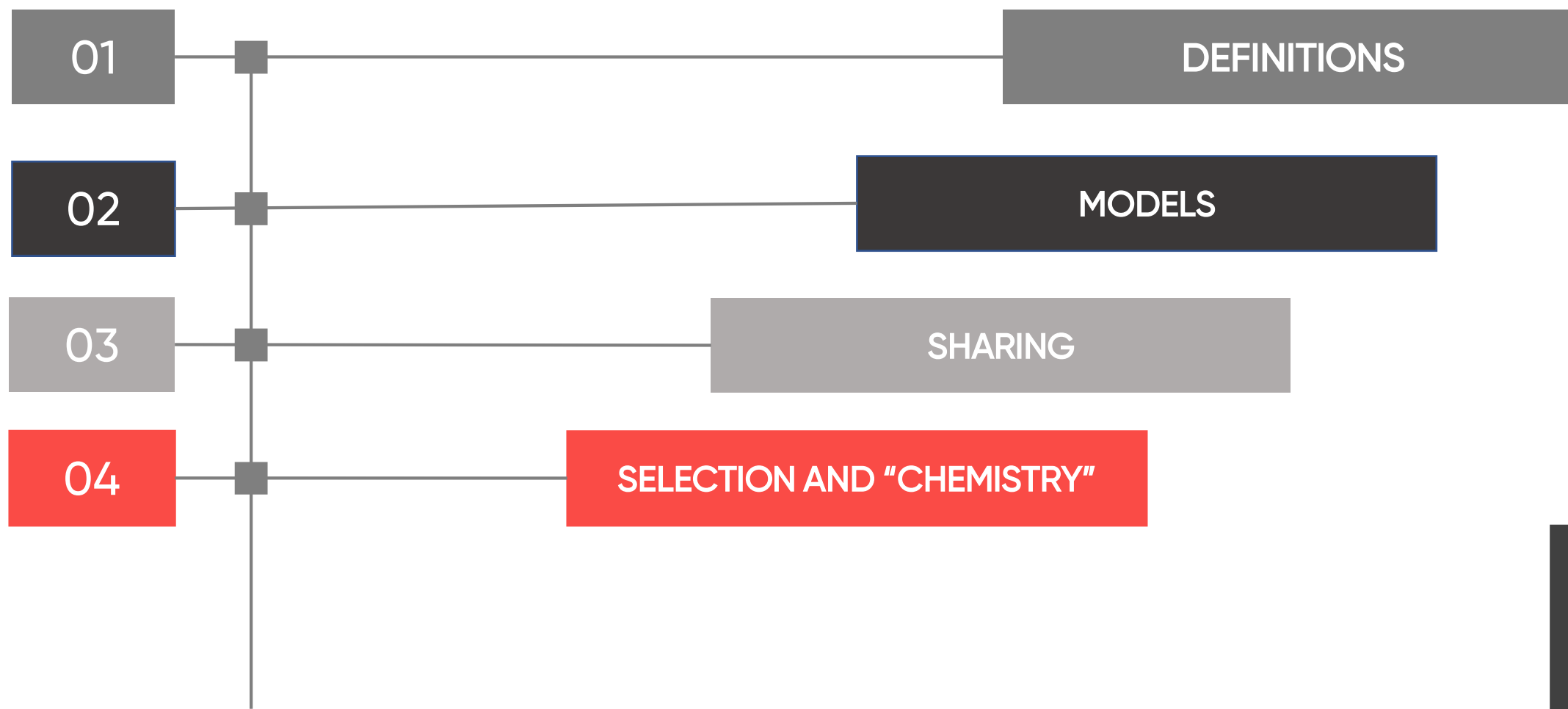


FIRST STEPS IN DISCIPLE- MAKING



David Kornfield, 2020

Whether one is a relatively new Christian, a veteran church member, a leader or a pastor, the question of how to begin a disciple-making relationship is challenging. Here are some possible starting points:





DEFINITIONS

Define clearly what is a disciple and a discipler. Until you do that and come to agreement with other people about this you will be moving in some degree of confusion and uncertainty. This can lead to conflicts and disillusionment when it becomes clear there are fundamentally different perspectives or presuppositions related to these words.

Here are some possible definitions. Feel free to modify them!

A *disciple* is a follower of Jesus. Amplified, a disciple is a follower of Jesus who is intentionally growing to become more like him, extending his mission to others. This definition is simple and intuitive with its three dimensions, following Jesus, growing and being sent.

A *discipler* is one who intentionally helps others become like Jesus. Amplified, a discipler is one who intentionally helps others become like Jesus through loving, modelling, equipping and mobilizing them.

MODELS

Behind these definitions are various models or presuppositions. Some people are familiar with just one model and may be resistant to anything else; others may be resistant to the one model they're familiar with because they've had bad experiences. Recognizing bad experiences and acknowledging multiple models opens conversations and hearts.

Disciple-making can be *collegial* (two people or a small group mutually and intentionally helping each other become like Christ) **or *apprenticeship*** (one person intentionally helping others who recognize his or her mature servant leadership). It will be nourished by corporate teaching and worship (e.g. a whole congregation together), but profits greatly from the personal application and accountability made possible by committed relationships.

Discipling can be *one-on-one* or in a *small group*. Because disciple-making is most effective in committed personal relationships, it doesn't happen well in large groups. It is possible to hear Scripture expounded powerfully and eloquently, yet not apply that Scripture to our own lives. It's that additional step, taken in the company of others who care about our growth in following Jesus, which helps us mature through and within the circumstances of our individual experience. At the same time, a large group made up of people who are experiencing disciple-making in one-on-one and small group relationships has the tremendous strength of establishing a disciple-making culture.

MODELS

Putting these two types of models together opens four possibilities:



Collegial
one-on-one

Collegial
small group

Apprenticeship
one-on-one

Apprenticeship
small group

The ideal may be a combination of all four possibilities: a small group that incorporates the one-on-one and a combination of a discipler proactively helping others but doing so in ways that involve everyone helping everyone grow, including him or her. While this may be the ideal, any of the four models or combination thereof is a definite step forward for someone who doesn't have any of them functioning well in their lives. It's more important to move ahead practically than to wait for an ideal possibility.¹

¹ The ideal is threefold: 1) a top-down approach where the top leader and leaders of our church, denomination or organization embrace disciple-making; a middle-out approach where "middle management" begin to make disciples flowing out from them and 3) a bottom-up approach where every mature Christian embraces disciple-making and gets on with multiplying. We need to pray and work toward all three, but specifically act in whatever sphere God has given us.

SHARING



When you have clear definitions and models, a next step could be to share them with others to see if they want to identify with being disciples, being discipled and/or being disciplers. You could walk through these questions or modify them as seems best:

01

Based on the definitions, do you identify with being a disciple?

02

If you identify with being a disciple or want to be one, would you prefer a collegial (mutual) or apprenticeship (one person leading) model or a combination?

03

Would you prefer a one-on-one, small group or a combination?

SELECTION AND “CHEMISTRY”

Collegial or mutual disciple-making can function in almost any group that is motivated to embrace growing in Christ intentionally. The key is that the group goes beyond Bible study and fellowship to intentionally sharing where they want and need to grow, asking for others' help. Hunger and thirst for growing, asking for others' help, being teachable, is the basic DNA of a disciple.

This can happen among two, three or four friends, in a cell group, among leaders or among pastors. It will normally work best with not many more than four people. If a cell group, for instance, has ten or twelve people, disciple-making will not happen significantly unless they break into smaller groups. Ideally, each of these small groups will have a facilitator-leader who joins the best of the collegial and apprenticeship models.

In contrast with the more collegial model that doesn't emphasize a leadership role for the discipler, the *apprenticeship* model calls for a certain amount of selection and chemistry. Jesus took a year and a half to identify the Twelve. A pastor or leader needs to look more carefully at the processes Jesus used, and think through selection criteria. These are discussed further in a separate article.

POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS



01 Apply the concepts in this article to your own life.

02 Share these concepts with others with whom you'd like to move forward in a disciple-making culture.

03 Get together to discuss these concepts.² This could be done virtually.

04 As a group walk toward applying these concepts in some fashion.³

² In the coronavirus reality, disciple-making and the various steps in this article may need to happen virtually. Group discussion and application of the concepts in this article can also be done virtually.

³ Note: In the context of an organization, denomination or church, this should begin on the leadership team. This means starting with the leader. Efforts to ask of others what the leadership itself is not doing will backfire, generating resistance to disciple-making. Once the leadership team has developed and profited from a disciple-making model and culture, they can each extend that to others. Jesus did exactly this. He initially focused on the Three, extended to the Twelve, and later to the Seventy who became the human wineskin for the Spirit's Pentecost explosion.

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