

Over the next few months, as Bush Disciples gets going, we're going to be learning about discipleship. Jesus wants us to become, not just believers, but disciples. Jesus never said "Go and make converts". He said, "Go and make disciples." So, we're going to be learning about discipleship.

And today's topic is, Disciples of Jesus Christ are **called**. You don't just wake up one morning, and decide for yourself, "What am I going to do today? I might start following Jesus."

That's not the way it works. You don't **decide**... – ... Jesus **calls**. When people make the decision, "I've got to get connected with God", that's usually in response to an inner urging of the Spirit. In my experience, when somebody actually begins to reconnect with God, or when they become a disciple of Jesus Christ for the very first time, this has always been in response to God's activity in their life. Sometimes it might have only been over a short period – maybe a few minutes or hours, but most often, it's been as a result of God's activity and God's calling of them over a number of weeks, months or even years or decades.

Oh, if only we could all be like those two brothers James and John. Jesus called them, ²² and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. Now, don't go getting cynical: *For those of us who have spent some years working with our fathers, and knowing the frustrations that that can cause, we could be forgiven for thinking, "Yeah, they were having a bad day with dad – no wonder they up and*

left the boat and the nets and poor old Zebedee... Why didn't Zebedee let them work the boat alone???. No wonder they were keen to follow Jesus....." Don't get cynical and take that view...

We have no idea what their family relationship was like, but the point is, Jesus called and they immediately followed Him.

Don't you wish that you had been, or that you would **become** that obedient?

*Most of us are more like a kelpie dog. You know what they're like hey? They naturally want to be out there. They want to run straight to the front of the mob and head them off, even if they're going the **right** way. Isn't that frustrating??? But when you get that kelpie pup to be obedient, and to come when it's called, then you're on a winner. And some of **us** are like that – we want to be off doing our own thing. Our master is calling us back and He's calling and He's calling....*

Some of us have this gentle urging inside of us, sometimes for years before we finally take the bible down off the shelf, or until we finally seek out someone we know to be a Christian, or until we finally get down on our knees and humble ourselves before the Lord, and say, “Lord, I know you've been calling me. I'm ready to follow wherever you lead me. Help me....”

Sometimes it takes us years, but God has been calling for all

that time. And God uses all sorts of circumstances to help us to hear His call, and to help us to follow that call.

On the morning of 1st September, 2012, God gave me 2 words – “Bush Disciples”. He then gave me another 106 words to explain what that meant. 6 months later, here we are – you and I together in (place). {{{{Would you have thought back then, that there would be people coming together in (place) to worship God and to pray and to learn from His word, and to grow together as disciples??? }}}}

My hope and my dream, is that this is **one** of the things that God is using, to help the people of (place) to hear His call, and to start following, because God uses all sorts of circumstances, to draw us into discipleship. And if you were to look back over your life, with spiritual eyes, I bet you can see times and places and events and encounters and challenges, where you can now see that, “hey God **was** actually calling me”... “Why didn’t I listen then?”

OK. So, disciples are called. The only decision we have, is “Am I going to obey? The master is calling – will I follow.” That might sound pretty blunt and simple... – well that’s because it is. The master is calling – will I follow. I don’t need to explain that too much do I? You get it, don’t you? Disciples are called...

Righto. What I want to look at today is, “What **sort** of person is God most likely to call?”

Because you know what? I see a very big discrepancy between the church of today, and the church that Jesus began.

Jesus kicked off **His** church with 12 nobodies. And yet you take a look at the Christian church of the western world today. As a generalisation, it is a church that is aging, filled with business people and with those who are influential. It is predominantly suburban, highly educated, mostly female and thoroughly middle-class. That’s a generalisation, and it isn’t true in all places. But those who answer the call to discipleship today, on average, are very different to the ones who Jesus drew in His day.

Jesus called young men, of working class, most probably poorly educated, of little influence, and of questionable position in society.

Out of the 12, He called 4 fishermen, 1 tax collector, and 7 others who didn’t even rate a mention – they were men of such little consequence. **Before** Jesus called them, these men were nobodies. Tax collectors don’t change much. We don’t like them do we? Tax collectors are not popular people. And fishermen: Probably not too many professional fishermen based at (town). *In this district, the equivalent social status of a fisherman in Jesus’ day, would probably be a roo shooter. I haven’t got anything against roo shooters – I shot roos for a*

living myself, once. I may even have to take it up again to support my family while I do Bush Disciples work, and I'm willing to do that.... We love roo shooters – we just keep our fuel tanks locked, hey????

Well, that's what fishermen were like. Fishermen were rough men, who battled the elements, didn't always have the greatest of reputations; worked all night; always looked half asleep, but essentially they made an honest living by manual labour, and lots of inconvenient hours...

Imagine if the church in this district grew because there was an influx of roo shooters, who answered God's call and started following Jesus... Would that surprise you? Well, it shouldn't. The point I'm making is this: "God calls nobodies". I'm a nobody. And God called me.

So, let's have the next reading.

1 Corinthians 1:²⁶ Brothers, think of what you **were when you were called**. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸ He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the

things that are,²⁹ so that no one may boast before him.³⁰ It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.³¹ Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”

2 When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.³ I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power,⁵ so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

God calls nobodies. In fact, I've actually toyed with the idea, of instead of calling what we're doing “Bush Disciples”, calling it “The church for nobodies”. There's plenty of churches filled with the popular people – filled with the influential – filled with the successful and with the well respected... **Where's** the churches for the nobodies? Where do **they** fit? I'm a nobody. I know I'm not a popular person. I never have been. Nobody's going to come and hear me speak because I naturally attract people, and they want to be

like me....

Like Paul speaking with the Corinthians, I've come here today in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. I don't have any wise and persuasive words. But I hope, that you will hear God's word, coming through what I say today, ⁵ so that your faith might rest, not on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

My hope and my prayer, is that, in spite of me and my fragility and my imperfection, and my simplicity, - in spite of me, you will still encounter God.

God calls nobodies. And God uses nobodies. That's the way it has always been, and that's the way it will continue to be.

Around the year 177ADⁱ, an anti-Christian philosopher named Celsus wrote these words:

This is the sort of thing Christians say:

“Let no one educated, no one wise, no one sensible draw near. For these abilities are thought by them to be evils. But as for anyone ignorant, anyone stupid, anyone uneducated, anyone who is a child, let him come boldly.”

By the fact that they themselves admit that these people are worthy of their God, They show that they want and are able to convince only the foolish, dishonourable and stupid, and only slaves, women, and childrenⁱⁱ.

Wow. They said that 1800 years ago.... They could just as easily be the words of Richard Dawkins or Lawrence Krauss. They say, “Christianity is for idiots”.... Well, don’t be put off by them. And rather than trying to counter their claim by pointing to the myriad of brilliant scientists, mathematicians, doctors and academics, who are also disciples of Jesus Christ... Rather than pointing to the popular and successful people and making a big deal out of superstars – musicians, footy players and Olympians who are disciples of Christ.... Don’t point to them... That’s what the devil wants you to do.

God calls nobodies for a reason.

^{verse 27} But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸ He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no one may boast before him.

Humanly speaking, if I wanted to build an organisation that would change the world, I would gather around me people of much influence; people of immense wealth; people of extraordinary intellect; the high achievers of the world – professional sportsmen and women; executives of multinational corporations; Actors and performers – people of renown.... I would gather together those who are most popular in their communities, and I would get all of these

people, to use every resource at their disposal, to attract people to my organisation that was going to change the world...

And if I did that, who would get the credit? Well, all of these extraordinary people would get the credit of course, which is **why** God did the opposite.

God didn't start His church with entrepreneurs, or high achievers or performers... He started His church with nobodies. And because we're nobodies, when God does a mighty work – when God begins to build His church, not **one** of us can boast about it.

When God achieves His purpose through nobodies – that's the sort of thing that can silence His critics. Richard Dawkins might be able to use **his** understanding of science to try and explain away the existence of God. But when God uses nobodies to change the world – when through the ministry of a nobody, an individual soul, finds life, purpose and meaning – he can't explain that away, because **this** is a demonstration of the power God – It can't be the cleverness of men.....

Now, I hope you're not offended that I might be inferring that you are a nobody. I'll let you work that out for yourself. But if I'm full of myself – if I'm confident in my own position, abilities, work, or righteousness, I don't have the right self image to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

There's an interesting tradition about the royal family in Vienna. The Hapsburgs were fabulously wealthy and built glorious castles. When one of them would die, the funeral procession would go from the castle to the basement of a certain church. The priest inside would hear a knock at the door:

"Who is it?"

*"His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor of Austria,"
but the priest would answer, "I do not know him."*

There would be a pause and a second knock and the priest would ask "Who is it?"

"His Imperial Majesty, The Emperor of Austria."

"I do not know him."

There'd be another pause and a third knock: "Who is it?"

"A poor sinner," and the priest would open the door.

God opens the doors of heaven to all who repent honestly, and give themselves to the grace offered in Jesus Christ.ⁱⁱⁱ

Don't ever get into your head that you're not the right **type** of person to become a disciple of Jesus Christ.

- Don't ever say to yourself, "I'm a nobody, therefore God doesn't want me."
- You can't say, "I'm not good enough" "I'm not smart enough" "I'm not from the right strata of society" "I don't even know what 'strata' means".
- You can't say, "I'm too poor" "I'm too ugly" "I'm too

bad” “I’m too depressed” “I’m too despised” “I’m too sad”.

- You can’t say, “I’m too broken” “I’m too rough” “I’m too lowly” “I’m too cranky” “I’m too old” or “I’m too young”.

Get it out of your mind that you’re not the right **type** of person to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. When you realise that you’re a nobody – that’s precisely when you are **exactly** the **right** type of person to begin the journey of being His disciple.

Some of the biggest churches in Australia today, are led by very popular people. And they surround themselves with people who want to be just like them. Many little churches, that can be found right across Australia today, are also led by those who are most popular. And they **attract** people – as popular people seem to do.

They’ll often teach their people a message of “self worth”; “self dignity”; “self identity”; “self actualisation”; and “self sufficiency”.... It’s all about self.... I’m not going to teach you that, because I’m so fed up with self, that I know I need Jesus.

^{Verse 30} It is because of **him** (God) that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and

redemption. ³¹ Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

When you're a nobody, you know you've got absolutely nothing to boast about. But as a disciple of Jesus, you've got plenty to boast about:

- When you were **once** a sinner, but now Christ has made you righteous, boast in Jesus Christ. Tell the other nobodies about His righteousness that has become yours.
- When you were **once** rotten to the core, but now Christ has made you holy, boast in Jesus Christ. Tell the other nobodies how Jesus can make them holy.
- When you were **once** far from God, and sold as a slave to sin, boast in Jesus Christ. Boast in His redemption – Tell the other nobodies the message of the cross, and how Jesus bought you back with His blood.

Disciples of Jesus, are called. Every one of us were bad when we were called. But by His grace and mercy – by His sacrifice on the cross – by His resurrection,.... He becomes our righteousness, holiness and redemption. You can't boast about yourself. But you can be proud of Him and what He's done.

Jesus calls nobodies, to follow Him. Will you follow Him?
Amen.

ⁱ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celsus>

ⁱⁱ Origen, “Contra Celsum” 3.44 in www.holwick.com

ⁱⁱⁱ Adapted from Richard B. Vinson in James W. Cox, *The Minister's Manual*: 1996, New York: Harper, 1995, p. 194. In www.holwick.com.