

**THE CONFIDENCE TRAP 3 – A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF MARK
MARK 2:1-11
SEPTEMBER 25, 2016**

I was listening to a podcast recently that was talking about one of the all-time Golden State Warrior greats. Before Steph Curry was the sharpshooter leading the Warriors to the finals, Rick Barry was the sharpshooter leading the Warriors to the finals. You might remember Barry for a few reasons. He led the Warriors to the 1975 championship, his brash style, but more than anything he is often remembered as one of the only NBA stars to shoot his free throws “granny” style. If you don’t know what that means, watch this.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1bm6hgRli-o>

As it turns out, “granny” style is actually really good. Rick Barry led the league in free throw percentages six times. He shot close to 90% over the span of his career, and in one season, 1978-79, he only missed nine free throws the whole season. The question emerges, why was no one else doing this? Wilt Chamberlain was a notoriously bad free throw shooter except for a couple of seasons. Why was he better in those two seasons, because he shot granny style, but he went back to shooting regular free throws and his free throw percentage dipped by 10-20 percentage points. The question emerges, why would someone not do the thing they know would make them better? Every NBA player should want to score more points. Why wouldn’t anybody with a lower percentage start shooting this way?

This is a strange human conundrum that is much bigger than basketball. Why don’t we do the things we know would make us better? Why won’t we do the things that are proven to help us?

Mark Grannovetter is a professor of sociology at Stanford. I think he has an answer for this bizarre aspect of human behavior. He is famous for many papers he has written on social theory. One paper he wrote is called *The Threshold Models of Collective Behavior*.

Grannovetter argues we all have a certain threshold that determines when we will jump in

to certain collective behavior. The threshold is how many people need to be partaking in a certain behavior before you will join in. Those with a low threshold require very few people to engage in a behavior before they will join in. High threshold people require a large group of people participating before they will jump in.

Rick Barry had a low threshold. He didn't care what anyone thought about his granny style because he was too busy racking up points and winning games. Wilt Chamberlain had a high threshold. If no one else was doing it, he didn't have enough confidence to keep doing it. Wilt Chamberlain later admitted he gave up the granny shot because he felt like a sissy. Strangely he chose to score less than to rock the boat. Ironically, it was more socially acceptable for him to be a lesser player.

We are in the third week of our series titled "The Confidence Trap." We are looking at the first half of the Gospel of Mark and one major theme emerges, people don't know nearly as much as they think they do about God. Mark is chock-full of stories of people questioning Jesus, his identity, his methods, his theology. They think they have God down pat, but Jesus regularly confronts the idols they have made. Interwoven with these theological experts, we see occasional stories of bold faith. People who have such a confidence in Jesus that they do bold things. They have a low threshold and they put themselves out there.

Low threshold people are often disruptive. They are often innovators. They are bold and they are rare. I want to introduce you to a crew of low threshold disruptors.

Mark 2: 1-2

I have to tell you, I saw something completely new this week that led to a clearer picture of Jesus. I honestly don't know why I missed it before, but it deepened my view of this passage. Verse 1 strongly implies this is Jesus' house. Matthew 4 says Jesus moved to Capernaum, so we find Jesus at home. I don't know why this has often eluded me. I think you imagine Jesus going from town to town preaching and traveling so much, you just assume he is bunking up in people's houses and flopping in Motel 6's. You think of the

passage where Jesus says, “Foxes have holes in the ground, but the Son of Man doesn’t have a place to lay his head.” At one point, he had a home, his ministry was just beginning and he still lived there. It’s where he had done carpentry and gotten to know people in town.

For some reason, I have always taken this to mean he was in his hometown, but I think this is quite literal. Why wouldn’t he have a home? You notice it says, it was reported that he was home. The rumors and stories about this man are growing. They hear he is back in town and everybody goes to the carpenter’s house. Many of them had been there before dropping off a table to be fixed or picking up a chair he had given new life to. But now they were coming to the same house for a completely different reason. He was fixing broken people and giving new life to broken souls. That this is Jesus’ house will become all the more important as the story progresses.

Mark 2:3-4

These four men are unwittingly setting the stage for Jesus. These four men bring one of their friends, who is paralyzed, to Jesus. We have discussed this before, in this culture, paralysis was more than a physical encumbrance. If you were paralyzed, you were more likely than not a social pariah who begged for money. You probably dragged yourself along the dusty streets of your hometown and depending upon the degree of your nerve damage, you had no control over your bowels. You spent your life dirty, alone, ostracized and on the fringe of society.

Jesus has been gaining popularity and fame even though he has been trying to dodge it. His house in Capernaum gets surrounded and filled up with people wanting to see him and be healed. This man, who has nothing, probably begged his friends to bring him to Jesus. The house is so crowded you couldn’t even hear or see Jesus from the outside, so these men take their friend up on top of the roof and they begin to dig into it. They do something socially unacceptable and make a hole and yell down to Jesus to come up to them. They dig deep; they do something intrusive, expensive and damaging for the sake of healing. They rip open a man-sized hole in this family’s house. Some people have tried to minimize this.

The word here, *exorosso*, is violent. Some commentators imply that it was a thatched roof that you could just move aside some straw, but there was mud involved, there was dust and the straw was cut for the place. By making it nice and neat, this is yet another way that people try to soften the rough edges of the gospel. They try to sanitize and sterilize it. They think surely Jesus wouldn't honor someone who has just destroyed personal property, but he does exactly that. Then you read and understand that this was not just some friend's house but his house!

I have a new appreciation for this with kids. They are walking destruction forces, and that's when they aren't even trying. Recently we let the kids watch the movie *Home Alone* mainly because we loved that movie growing up. They loved it too. If you don't remember, the little boy, Kevin, gets left home alone and has to fend off two burglars who have dubbed themselves the "wet bandits." They call themselves the wet bandits because this is their calling card. Every house they rob they flood by turning on the water and stopping up the sink with a rag. Well, Kevin beats the wet bandits with a series of booby traps and stunts and the movie ends with the family back together for Christmas. That was all great except our son is now emulating this movie by building little traps. The other day he put a washrag in the sink and turned on the water then let mom know he was flooding the house.

That stuff drives you crazy. It's one thing when someone else is messing up your home. At least you have some grace for your kids. But four hooligans you have never met? Consider everything at play in this moment. Jesus has come home. He is probably getting a little rest. The rumor spreads that he has returned, so everyone shows up to his house. This is like the paparazzi crowding a celebrity, except Jesus doesn't have bodyguards or a ten-foot gate to keep them out, so a sea of humanity spills into his home and surrounds it. Jesus seizes the moment and begins to teach them about the Kingdom of God. Everyone is quiet and sitting at the feet of the rabbi. Then these low threshold disruptors bust in. They tear open Jesus' roof, they interrupt the middle of his sermon and they completely change the direction of the moment. These are low threshold guys. Shameless really.

Jesus isn't rattled. He isn't rattled by the man-sized hole in his roof. He isn't rattled by the dust and straw raining down from his busted roof. He isn't rattled by the fact that four guys are lowering a dude down through his ceiling.

Mark 2:5-12

Jesus heals this man in body and soul. As a sidenote and call back to week one of our series, don't miss this, Jesus forgave this man's sins. Two really important things here: 1) Jesus has not died on the cross yet or been resurrected. Our normal formula for the forgiveness of sins is that Jesus had to die on the cross to pay for our sins. And yet, for some reason here, Jesus feels comfortable offering forgiveness before that transaction has been made. 2) This man is forgiven because of his friend's faith. He did not ask for forgiveness. He didn't pray a prayer or ask Jesus into his heart. He is forgiven because of his friends' faithfulness.

I tell you this because we are talking about low-threshold actions and thinking today. The majority of Christians today have a formulaic approach to what the gospel is and how it is accessed. The gospel for many is that Jesus died on the cross and rose again to pay for your sins. When, in all reality, that may only be a small part of what the gospel is, and it's not nearly that formulaic. For Nicodemus, he tells him to be born again, but for the rich young ruler, he tells him to sell everything, and for this man, he is forgiven because his friends are faithful. Throughout this series, I want to continue to poke the idea of the gospel and what we think we know about it.

Because the last people we want to be like are the religious professionals in verse 6. They hear Jesus offer forgiveness and they have questions. They are immediately angry. Why? Because they know how God forgives and this isn't it. They know how the religious system works and this isn't it. The last thing they are comfortable with is something bowing or straining the religious system they have constructed.

I took a class in seminary with Doug Stuart and David Wells. They were both published authors and seminary professors. Wouldn't you know it; they often made their books

required reading for their courses. It's a nice system. I still remember this class because there was one guy who had it all figured out. I think in his mind, the seminary should have just given him the diploma on day one. He often spoke up. Often argued. Often had the right answer, at least in his own mind. One day, he was rebuking the professor and made a point from one of their books to rebuke them, the sheer audacity. The professor replying in so many words, "That's my book and that's not what it means."

That will be the perpetual experience for the religious professionals in this gospel. Jesus is going to be implicitly saying time and again, "This is my book and that's not what it means."

That brings us back to this gang of low threshold hooligans, the guys who interrupted a sermon and destroyed Jesus' roof. The ones who rained down dust and straw on all the other people sitting there. What drives that kind of audacity? People are probably yelling at them to stop interrupting. Yelling at them for destroying Jesus' house. Yelling at them because those inside are filthy now and have dust and soot in their eyes and hair. What drove them to such a length?

Rick Barry's love for winning the game by scoring the most points he could score eclipsed any fears or concerns of what people thought of his granny shot. That's the deal with low threshold people. They have a bigger driving force that makes them immune, deaf or numb to the possible concerns of their peers.

I think the more you love Jesus, the more you will love people, and when you love people, you do dumb stuff for them. Audacious stuff. You make a mess on their behalf and you don't care. You leave money on the table by not working extra hours so you can be by their side. You take some time and go visit them when you have a million other things to do. You come crashing through the ceiling because your love for them eclipses your cares of what people might think.

Which leads to one of the biggest confidence traps in our world today, that you can do it alone, that you don't need people in your life. I don't care if you are an introvert or

extrovert. You need people to carry your mat. We all have some version of a mat, some infirmity or inability in our lives. It really is beneficial to have people that will carry you when the times get tough. It really is great to have people who will tear through a roof for you.

The question for you today is simple, "Who carries your mat?" Do you have a few somebodies who will tear through a roof for you? Will they waste valuable Silicon Valley time to slow down and pray with you? Will they watch your kids for you? Will they bring you a meal when times are tough? Will they send you a note and give you a hug?

At SFC, we have three core tools for discipleship. Life in God - which is intentional Christ-centered worship. Life for Others - which is serving and sharing in Jesus name. And Life with Others - practicing your faith in Christian community. Life with Others is about Bible study and investigating spiritual matters just as much it is about a mat community. It is gifting you with people who will tear through a roof for you. It's people who will weep when you weep and celebrate when you celebrate. It's individuals who drag you to Jesus.

Don't miss this today; life with others will preserve your soul. Sometimes when your faith is waning or just about absent, these people can still carry you, and that is enough because Jesus forgave this man because of the faith of his friends. Because they were willing to make fools of themselves. Because they were willing to make a mess.

One of my favorite movies is *Little Miss Sunshine*. It's the story of a dysfunctional family who goes on a road trip so their daughter can be in the little Miss Sunshine beauty pageant. The road trip shows that everyone in the family is having struggles but they finally make it to the pageant. As it turns out, the girl's dance routine isn't that well suited to the competition and the judges try and kick her off stage. That's when her family steps in.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ECfvSmDe_-0

That's low threshold stuff right there. That's a mat community right there. Doing audacious stuff to show love. Jesus of Nazareth was the ultimate low threshold guy. He surrendered himself to the authorities and laid down his life. No one else was doing that. He led the way, and we can do that for one another. If you don't have people who will carry your mat, we'd love to help you find some. If you don't have somebody who will tear open a roof for you, we'd love to help you find some.