



I want to start off by asking a question. Have you ever been driving somewhere? Maybe you're driving to work or to an appointment, picking up your kids, driving to school, whatever it might be, and you're just like a little bit late. Like maybe you're just right on time. You're not late-late, but you're just a little late. And then you get to the first intersection, and you see this—a red light. And you know, you're like, “Ugh, you know, I never usually hit this intersection here. What are the chances?” But not a big deal as long as we keep moving.

And so then you're driving, you get to the second intersection, and it's another red light. And you're like, “Man, what are the chances that this would happen? Like, of course, this is my luck. But you know what? Not a big deal.” But now you're on the verge of getting late. So when the light turns green and you're driving through and you see the next intersection coming up, and you're thinking to yourself, “There's no way that...” and of course it changes to red. And it's red light after red light after red light, and you're thinking, “What are the chances?” I mean, now you're late-late. Every other time you take this route, it's like mostly green lights, but the one time that you're running behind, it's just a bunch of red lights. And you're thinking, what are the chances? Anyone been there before? What are the chances?

Right? Just a moment of confession here—I detest red lights. I just don't like them. Maybe you all are holier than me, but I don't know. I'd rather get to the place that I'm going than sit at a red light. I mean, I wouldn't just drive through one or anything, but I just don't like them. Maybe you do. Just pray for me, I guess. I'm just saying, you know, what are the chances? And not “what are the chances” like, wow, this is interesting, but “what are the chances?” Of course, this is happening to me right now. You know, that's just my luck. Everything is working against me.

Now, it's one thing if we're talking about red lights because that's just traffic. Not that big of a deal. You just move on. It's frustrating, but you move on. But what about those moments in life where it feels a lot heavier than just a red light? I'm talking about those moments where you look up and you go, “How did I get here? This isn't how it was supposed to go. This wasn't what I had planned or how I thought it would be.”

And so now you're in a red-light moment. You're in this place where you didn't plan this. You're in a place that you didn't choose. You're in a place that you wouldn't have picked. And it's in those moments where it's not just frustrating anymore—it's disorienting. It's confusing. And it's in those moments where we say, “What are the chances that



this is happening to me? God, what are you doing? This isn't what it was supposed to look like."

And I know we know all the right answers. "You know, just trust God. He's got a plan. He's going to work all this for good." And yeah, that's true. But in the middle of those red-light moments, we don't always see it. And so what I want to do this weekend is I want to ask this big idea question, which is this: What do you do when life doesn't go the way you planned? What do you do when you thought you'd be over here, but yet you find yourself over here? Especially when you're trying to follow God, and you're just not sure what he's doing.

And if you were here last weekend, we talked about how you and me—we were made to reflect God's glory. We were made to participate in his mission in the world. And so you're trying to live on mission, and yet life isn't going the way you planned. And it's in those moments we all start to ask the same thing: What are the chances? And so this big idea question—what do you do when life doesn't go as planned—we're going to answer this by looking at the Apostle Paul in a specific moment in his life in the book of Acts.

So before we do that, let's just get some context so we all are on the same page as what's going on. And so if you know your Bible—and maybe you know your Bible, but you don't know this—it's important to know that Acts was written by Luke. In fact, Acts is Luke's second volume. So, you're reading through the Bible, you get to the New Testament, and you get to the Gospel of Luke—that's volume one for Luke. And he's telling you and me about the life and the death and the resurrection of Jesus. And so you continue moving on. You get to the book of Acts. Well, that's volume two for Luke. And Acts—Luke and Acts—should really be read through together, because what you see is that Acts is what happens next. It's the gospel message being spread throughout everywhere through the leading and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And so Luke wrote Acts.

So what do we know about Luke? Well, Luke—he was a doctor. And he tells us that he investigated everything very carefully. And so he pays very close attention to detail. And so we know this about Luke. And on top of that, he didn't just write from a distance, but Luke was actually there for part of this journey in Acts. Because as you're reading, a lot of times the narrative is "they did this" and it's about them. But then sometimes it shifts to "we," because for Luke, he was traveling with Paul in some of these events, and he was there for himself, and we're going to see that in a moment.

So we got Luke, but I want to shift over to Paul because we're going to focus on Paul a lot today. And many of you were here for Easter a few weeks ago, and Pastor Chip gave us the background context on who Paul was. So here's the spark notes: Paul was a



Pharisee. He was a strict opponent to the Christian faith. And so Paul, as you're reading through Acts, we get to chapter 9, and he has this encounter with the risen Jesus, and now his life is changed. And you're reading through the book of Acts, and you see that Paul becomes like the prominent figure. He's like the main messenger carrying the gospel throughout [the Roman Empire].

And you get to chapter 27, and so Paul is on his way to Rome, but yet this isn't anything like a comfortable missions trip—he's a prisoner. And so he's in this kind of "what are the chances" type of moment. But it's important that he gets to Rome because for him, this is the power of the empire. This is the center of the empire. This is like the most powerful place in the world. And so Paul really wants to get there. He wants to see the gospel spread.

But yet as we're reading through chapter 27, it's anything but what you would expect. I mean, what are the chances? There's a violent storm at sea. The ship is driven off course. Everyone's freaking out. They're fearing for their lives. And eventually the ship is wrecked. I mean, what are the chances? Now, God tells Paul he's going to make it to Rome. And we're told that all 276 of the passengers, they survive—but they make it just barely.

And so we get to chapter 28, and Paul is alive, but he's in a place that he never would have expected to be. And we're going to pick up the story from here.

So, chapter 28, verse 1—we're told, remember Luke is the one that wrote this, and he's there—**"After we were brought safely through, we learned that the island was called Malta."** And so we really get the picture here—just think about this: They just came through the storm. They just came through the chaos. They came through this shipwreck. And Luke says that we were brought safely through. Now, a lot of us oftentimes, we would miss this in the text because honestly, we miss this in our own lives—that right here at the beginning of the passage, God's providence is already at work. That right here at the beginning, see the stormy sea—and oftentimes in scripture, the sea represents chaos or disorder—the stormy sea couldn't stop God's call on Paul's life.

And so they make it safely through, but we learn that the island that we're on is called Malta. Malta. Where's Malta? What's going on on Malta? See, Malta is this small island in the Mediterranean. This is not the destination that Paul wanted to go to. He wants to get to Rome. And so that we get the full picture—here's a map. Here's Rome, and you all know where Rome is in Italy. We got Rome, and then 420 miles away, we have this little tiny island called Malta. What's someone like Paul doing in Malta? I mean, what are the chances that after being beaten and imprisoned, after surviving the storm and the sea, after barely



making it to shore, now he's stuck on an island that he didn't plan to be on?

And if I'm Paul, I'm going, "Man, what are the chances? God, I mean, thank you for bringing me safely to shore and all that, but like what are you doing? I thought I wanted to get to Rome. I thought that—that's where the gospel was going to get to. How did I end up here? Because this doesn't just feel off-plan—it feels off-purpose."

Have you ever been there? You ever been to Malta? I don't mean like a vacation—I know some of you are getting your vacation plans together now. I don't mean geographically. I'm talking about that time when you thought that job was going to work out, but it didn't. Or that time that you thought you were going to be married by now and you're not. Or the time that you thought that door was from God, but yet it slammed shut. Or that time that you thought you'd be further along by now, and you're nowhere close. Or that time in your life that you thought it would look different than it does, and yet here you are, and you find yourself in a place that you didn't plan, you didn't choose, you wouldn't have picked. And you start asking, "What are the chances? What are the chances?" And so Paul is here in an unexpected place, but more than that, he's there in a way that he never would have expected.

And so he's here in Malta, and we're told that **"The native people..."** And some of your translations may say barbarians here—and all that really means is that these were non-Greek speakers. They were people that didn't speak Paul and Luke's language. And so these people, well, they showed us unusual kindness—just kindness out of the ordinary—because they built a fire for us and they welcomed all of us, all 276 survivors. And they welcomed us because it had begun to rain, and it was cold. They're just being good, hospitable people. They're just being nice. See, and it's interesting here because we've got the people who are supposed to be far from God that are being hospitable. But yet, when you're reading through these New Testament stories, it's the people who are the religious people, the good church people, that they're not being hospitable—they're being hostile. That should make us pause and look at how we treat other people, especially in those Malta moments.

And so they're being nice. They're showing kindness. And Paul responds by gathering a bundle of sticks and putting them on the fire. He's just serving. He's just being a part of the community. He's not pouting. He's not doubting. He's not being like, "God, what are you doing?" He's not trying to escape. He's just being faithful with what's in front of him.

And so while he's doing that, look what happens: **"A viper came out because of the heat and fastened to his hand."** Okay, come on, Luke. I mean, for real. What—are you making some of this



up? I mean, what are the chances, right? What are the chances after surviving the sea, the next thing waiting for Paul is a snake—a serpent—another red light? Have you ever had a moment like that? A moment where things went from bad or hard, and instead of getting better, it gets worse.

And so Paul is here. He's got a snake hanging, dangling from his hand. And: **“When the native people saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, ‘No doubt this man is a murderer.’”** See, they see one moment, and they think they understand the whole picture. Not that we would ever do anything like that, right? So he must be a murderer. **“Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live.”** And they're not talking about justice like an idea—they're talking about a goddess. This was their worldview or their religion, that in their minds, this is a higher power that's making sure that he gets what he deserves. In other words, they look at Paul and they think something bad happened, so he must be bad or he must have done something bad.

And honestly, we do the same thing when something goes wrong. We start asking, what did I do? God must be out to get me. Is this payback for something? And if some of you are here, maybe you're in a Malta moment, or maybe you've been in a Malta moment, and you've been wondering what you did to deserve it, because that's what these islanders believed. And we have this like Chutes-and-Ladders theology—that if you do good, something good will happen. But if you do bad, something bad will happen. And that's why you're in Malta. But maybe that's not why Paul's in Malta.

So what does Paul do? So let's continue on. **“[Paul], however, just shook off the creature into the fire.”** He just shakes it off. He just keeps going. He doesn't panic. He doesn't have some grand speech. He just puts on the 2014 hit from Taylor Swift and says, “I'm going to shake, shake, shake, shake, shake it, baby. Shake it off.” Any Taylor Swift fans in the room? Some of you? I did the Lion King thing last week, and a friend of ours didn't get it. So I thought maybe she would get the Taylor Swift thing. No? Maybe not. I digress.

But here's the thing. Maybe Taylor Swift—she may not be a preacher—but maybe she is preaching. Because sometimes you do just need to shake it off. Sometimes the thing that you're going through or the thing that's holding on to you, sometimes you've got to shake it off. And let me tell you why. Because what's really interesting here is that remember Luke and Acts should be read together. So you have Acts, and at the end of Acts we have this mention of a viper. The only other time that viper is mentioned in Luke's writings is in the beginning of Luke, in Luke chapter 3, and it's when judgment is being talked about. And so this makes this moment even more powerful because the viper or the serpent in Scripture oftentimes represents judgment or

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death or it represents evil. And the point is—the viper doesn't win. Death doesn't win. He just shakes it off into the fire, and he lives. So not only does the stormy sea—the chaos—not stop God's call on Paul's life, but the serpent doesn't either. The things that once symbolized death no longer have the final word.

See, that's where you go: "Amen." Cause like that was some good preaching. You know, I got it, I got it: "Amen! That was good." It doesn't have the final word.

And so Paul just shakes it off into the fire. He suffers no harm. And: **"They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead."** Because that's what snake bites do. They know how this works. They're waiting for the next thing. But yet: **"...when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him..."** they changed their minds and thought, "He must be a god." Don't you just love people? Because that's what people do. At one moment, Paul's a murderer, the next he must be a god.

See, we just came out of Easter week, and Jesus experienced the same thing. At one moment they're saying, "Hosanna in the highest," and then the next week they're saying, "Crucify him." And what that shows us is that people will misread your life, especially when you're in a Malta moment. And if you're not careful, you'll start believing what they say. Or worse, you'll start believing it about yourself.

And so here's Paul in this Malta moment. He's in an unexpected place, foreign language. He's got unexpected pain, and he's now being completely misjudged or misunderstood. It's red light after red light after red light. And I have to imagine—because Paul is a great champion of the faith and all that—but he's still human. I have to imagine him saying, "Man, what are the chances? God, what are you doing?"

And if we're honest, we've asked some of those same questions. And for us, maybe we don't ask it in an inquiring way or a curious way—we've asked it more in a frustrated way, maybe even in an accusatory way. And so what if actually these aren't the wrong questions? Maybe we've just been asking them in the wrong way. Because let's continue on, and we see something interesting happen in verse 7.

It says, **"Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief man on the island, named Publius..."** So we've got a person introduced here—a new individual, not just a group, but a man named Publius, the chief official of the island, a leader, this one person on the island who has influence and access and resources. And so we meet this man named Publius.

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And “...[he] **received us and entertained us hospitably for three days.**” Three days. And that’s interesting because Paul has just been bitten by a viper—the moment that should have been a death sentence—and yet three days later, he’s sitting in the home of the most influential man of the island. Three days. Those aren’t just throwaway words. Can you think of anything else special that happened on the third day? See, all throughout Scripture, the third day often marks a moment where something is about to shift, where God is about to move. And here it is again, right in the middle of what feels like a detour or a red light moment—God is setting something up.

And so he entertained us for three days, and: “**It happened...**” I love how the ESV puts it here. It just kind of happened. It just so happened... “**that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery.**” I mean, think about it—what are the chances that Paul ends up on this island, and that he meets the most influential man while he’s there, and that that man’s father is sick right when Paul arrives? See, at some point you have to stop and ask—is this really just chance, or is something else going on? See, what if Malta wasn’t a mistake? What if Malta wasn’t just a detour? What if Malta wasn’t a setback? What if this is exactly where Paul needed to be?

I can think of moments in my life where—maybe you can too—where you look back and you go, “I don’t know what this is for. I don’t really know what’s going on.” But man, I look back and I see—God used that. He worked in a way that I didn’t imagine or I didn’t expect.

And here’s why that’s key: Because sometimes what feels like an interruption, it might actually be an invitation. What feels like maybe it’s a problem might actually be an opportunity. I love how our Executive Director, Michael, always talks to us on staff—that whenever we’re dealing with what could look like a problem, he always says, “No, it’s an opportunity.” And maybe some of you need to realize that, because maybe what looks like it’s an interruption is actually where God is about to do something. God’s about to do something, and Paul is about to step into it.

And so “**Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him, healed him.**” Did you catch that? The same hands—the ones that were just bitten by the snake while serving—are now the hands that God uses to bring healing. That’s not an accident. Sometimes the very place that you’ve been wounded becomes the place that God uses you. Sometimes the thing that hurt you becomes the way that God helps someone else.

And so Publius’s father is healed. But not only that—“**when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured.**” So this isn’t just a one-



time moment, but this moment spreads into a movement. The entire community is impacted here.

And in the final verse, we find that: **“They also honored us greatly, and when we were about to set sail, they put on board whatever we needed.”** So the place that looked like a setback became the place that sustained the mission. They got everything that they needed—provision, support, momentum. So Paul is still headed for Rome, but Malta wasn’t a waste. It was a part of the mission.

Now, there’s no mention of Paul preaching a sermon. There’s no message that we’re told about. There’s no altar call moment. But what we do see is presence and prayer and healing and faithfulness. See, sometimes the mission of God—it doesn’t look like a platform. It doesn’t look like a stage like this. Sometimes it just looks like simply being present and serving and trusting that God is working through it.

And so eventually, as you continue reading on in verse 11 and continuing on, you see that a ship does come and they’re able to make it to Rome—but they stay on Malta for three more months. And this wasn’t just a quick stop. It just wasn’t just a parenthesis moment. But as we come to the end of the passage, it makes me think that that question that I had asked you all earlier—“Have you been to Malta?”—really is not the right question either. Because it’s not about have you been there. It’s what are you going to do when you get to Malta?

Because for all of us, we find ourselves in unexpected places and plans not going the way that we thought. And we get to this point where we ask these questions: “What are the chances? God, what are you doing?” But now that we’ve gotten to the end of the story, it should make you realize that the real way to ask these questions is this:

Instead of, “What are the chances that this is happening to me?”—“What are the chances that God is doing something and setting something up?” Instead of saying, “God, what are you doing?”—it’s, “God, what are you doing? Because it looks like you’re on the move here.”

Because for Paul, even in a place that felt off course, even though he was in an unexpected place, even in circumstances that didn’t make sense, the mission of God was still moving forward. And Paul was exactly where he needed to be.

So, what about us? Remember, we’re asking this question: What do you do when life doesn’t go as planned? Well, I’ve got three thoughts here—three things for you to hold on to when you find yourself in that Malta moment. Because the truth is, we all find



ourselves in a place that we didn't expect or a place that we never chose for ourselves. And so here are three things for you to hold on to.

The first one is this: **You're not off-purpose just because you're off-plan.** You're not off-purpose. See, Paul was on his way to Rome, but the path to getting there didn't look anything like he expected. And that's often how God works. He does some of his deepest work in places that we would never have planned or chosen for ourselves.

And I love how it says it in verse 8: **"It happened..."** It just so happened. It just so happened that the storm came, and the winds blew him off course. It just so happened that he landed on this little island called Malta, when that's 420 miles from where he wanted to go. And it just so happened that a snake jumps out and bites him right when he's trying to serve. But he survives the snake, and then everyone sees him and thinks he's a god, and he gets an invitation to Publius's house. And it's at that point that he meets his father, who was sick with dysentery. It just so happened. It's just random. It's just coincidental. But from another perspective, maybe this is exactly where Paul needed to be.

And so it's interesting because if you read in chapter 27, Paul tells the crew on the ship, he says, "Hey, you guys shouldn't do this because if you do, we're going to crash." But then we see that God's working. So which is it? Was Paul supposed to go to Malta? What do you think? Was Paul supposed to go to Malta? We don't know. We don't know, because here's the truth: On this side of eternity, we don't always know. Yes, nothing is outside of God's control, but we don't always know how or why he's doing what he's doing. And that's the tension within Scripture, because on one hand we're told that our choices matter, but on the other hand we're told that God is still in control. On one hand we're told that we have freedom and agency, but on the other hand God is sovereign. And how does that work? I don't know. But I do know this—that God is so sovereign that even when things don't go the way that we planned, he's still at work in it. He's still at work.

And so maybe the question isn't, "Was Paul supposed to go to Malta?" Maybe the question isn't, "Are you supposed to be where you're at?" Maybe the question isn't, "Was this bad thing supposed to happen to you?" Maybe it's simply that God—somehow, someway—is working in the midst.

That's exactly what Joseph says at the end of the book of Genesis when he's gone through everything—he went to the pit, he ends up getting sold into slavery, he ends up going to prison after being falsely accused—but he ultimately ends up second in command of Egypt. And he looks at his brothers and he says, "Hey, listen.



You guys actually didn't send me here. It was God." And he says, "What you meant for evil, God meant for good." So which was it? Was it his brothers that sent him there, or was it God? I don't know. Maybe it was both. But here's what I do know: God was working then in Joseph's life, God was working in Malta in Paul's life, and God is working right now in your life. He's working.

And so the question for you and me to ask ourselves is this: What have you already decided about your situation that God might still be writing? What have you already decided about the place that you're in, even though it's unexpected, that maybe God is working in a way you can't see? Because if you want to navigate your Malta moment well, you've got to come to terms with this—that just because your life didn't go how you planned doesn't mean that God stopped working. Your calling hasn't changed. Your purpose hasn't disappeared. And just because you're off-plan does not mean that you're off-purpose.

And so what do you do in the meantime? Well, number two: **Stay faithful where you are, even if it doesn't make sense.** See, faithfulness isn't about having all the answers. Faithfulness is not about everything falling into place. Faithfulness is choosing to keep showing up, to keep trusting God, to keep living the way that he's called you to live, even when you don't understand what he's doing. And you want to know the best way to live that way? The best way to live it practically—it's to serve. You want to live faithfully? Choose to serve.

See, I'm not talking about a task—I'm talking about a posture. Because when life gets hard, our natural instinct is to turn inward, to focus on ourselves or to focus on our pain or to focus on our situation. But the way of Jesus is to move outward. And that's what we see Paul doing, because he's in this unexpected place. He didn't plan to be here, and he barely survived. And what's he doing? He's just gathering a bundle of sticks and helping out in the community. He's just serving. He's not sulking or spiraling or trying to escape—he's just being faithful with what's in front of him. He's just using whatever God puts in his hands.

And then even after he gets bit by the viper, we see later in verse 8 that Paul's using those same wounded hands to heal Publius's father and to heal the community. Those same hands—the ones that are wounded—are the hands that God is using to bring the healing. And what's really interesting here is that Luke actually sets up Paul, from a literary standpoint, as a type of Christ. Because remember, Luke wrote Luke and he wrote Acts. And so when you read Luke, Luke is talking about the life of Jesus. But when you look at Acts, we're seeing what that life in Jesus looks like lived out in his followers.



And so this story, when you look at it closely—Paul's life looks a lot like Christ's. So what do we know about Jesus? Well, Jesus's wounded hands become the means of healing for you and for me. And for Paul, his wounded hands become the means of healing. For Jesus, his suffering leads to global impact. And for Paul, his suffering leads to impact for the community. For Jesus, even when he's misunderstood, he continues to serve. And what does Paul do? He's misjudged and misunderstood, but yet he continues to serve.

See, that's the pattern of the Christian life. We don't just follow Jesus in what we believe—we follow Jesus in how we live. We follow Jesus in how we suffer. And what did Jesus do? He served. He turned the other cheek. He went the extra mile. He was willing to go lower and wash the feet of the very people who would betray him.

And so when your life doesn't make sense and when you're in that Malta moment, we don't just survive it—we step into it with faith and we serve. Because even in our suffering, we're being shaped and molded into the image of Christ. And the way that that shows up in your life—it starts with what's already in your hands. And that's the question: What's in your hand? Not someday, not when things get better, but right now. Because all throughout Scripture, we see God using what's already in people's hands. For Moses, it was a staff. For David, it was a sling and some stones. For the unnamed boy, it was the fish and the loaves. And for Paul, in this moment, it's a snake bite. What is it for you? What has God put in your hands? What's right in front of you? What's around you? What opportunity do you have to reflect Christ right where you are?

Because you may not be in control of where you are, but you do control how you show up. And sometimes your greatest impact happens simply when you stay faithful in the moment that you're in.

And lastly, probably most importantly: **Don't lose sight of the mission.** Don't lose sight of the mission, because there's a bigger picture going on here. God is doing something far bigger than what sometimes we see or imagine. See, this is what Jesus says at the beginning of Acts, which really sets the whole story of Acts. He says to his disciples, **"You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."** That's the mission. It's seeing God's glory and the name of Jesus go out over all the world, all creation. That's the whole point of the story.

And guess what? Malta may not have been on Paul's itinerary, but it was on God's. Because what do we see happen? That the whole community is impacted—not just one person, but a whole island. And what that means is maybe Malta wasn't just about Paul. Maybe Malta was about the people that were there. Maybe it was about the mission moving forward.



And see, this moment for Paul in Malta is not just a one-time thing. As you read through Acts and you read through Paul's letters when he talks about a lot of this stuff, you find out that he's been beaten and he's been imprisoned and he's been in danger over and over and he's been shipwrecked. And at another point in Paul's life, he reflects on this, and he's saying this to the church in Philippi. He says, **"I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel."** And he's talking about a specific thing when he says that, but really for Paul, whatever happens to him has served to advance the gospel.

Think about that—everything: the shipwrecks, the beatings, the imprisonment, the Malta moments—none of it gets wasted. Because this is the mission. This isn't about Paul figuring things out. This is the Spirit of God working through his life to carry the gospel forward. This isn't about you and me—God just giving us what we want so that we can see our plans come to fruition. It's about God accomplishing His mission through us, sometimes in places that we don't expect it to.

That's why we say all the time around here that we want to be intentional neighbors—because your life, your workplace, your neighborhood, your Malta moment might be the exact place where God wants to work through you. But the question is—where do you see God working right now? Where do you see him working? God, what are you doing? Because it looks like you're doing something here. It looks like you're moving right now.

Because just because you don't see what God is doing doesn't mean he's not doing something bigger. He is always working—even in Malta.

And so what do you do when your life doesn't go as planned? Well, you remember you're not off purpose. You stay faithful. And you don't lose sight of the mission. And I know some of you hear that and maybe you go, "Yeah, that's great for Paul, but I'm not Paul. I'm not some great hero of the Christian faith like that." And I hear that point. I get where you're coming from. So I'd like to tell you another story. I want to share with you my story. Is that okay? I want to share my story. And listen, I don't share this because I'm looking for an applause. I'm not here to make myself look great. I'm not here to make the name of Chris Pedro great. I'm here to make the name of Jesus great. But as I share this story, I want to testify what God has done in my life. I want to share my testimony. And I know some of you may have heard my story before, but maybe as you hear this story, maybe you can resonate with something and maybe you can see yourself in this story.

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And so for me, going back several years, it's August 2011. I'm 19 years old and I just finished my freshman year of college and preparing for the fall semester. And my dad hit one of the lowest moments in his life. He ended up losing his dental practice, and he ended up going through his second divorce. And what that meant was that child support wasn't coming into my mom anymore. So, I couldn't keep going to college. I had to drop out. And that also meant that my mom went through one of the most difficult times in her life from a financial standpoint. And it was hard for all of us, and we didn't really know what we were going to do. But my mom decided to downsize. And so she moved to Florida and brought my little brother, Jeff, and my sister, Justine. And so they moved down to Florida. And I had a decision to make. Am I going to stay up here in Pennsylvania and figure things out, or am I going to move down to Florida with my family and try to help them with the transition? Man, I was 19 years old. I don't know what I'm doing. And I did not want to move to Florida. And so I decided to go with them.

And I remember driving in the car with my mom down I-95, and I remember looking—I don't know if we had smartphones back then—but I remember looking at my friends who are moving forward with their lives, many of whom are finishing college and starting their careers, some even entering into ministry—everything that I wanted my life to look like. And there I'm driving in the car and probably at a red light thinking, "What are the chances?"

And so we get down to Florida, and it is anything but easy. It was hard because we came down with nothing. We had no furniture. We slept on the floor for the first maybe three to six months that we were down here. There's this story that we like to talk about where my brother, Jeff, he just really wanted a Slim Jim, and we couldn't afford a Slim Jim. And we laugh about it now, but back then, man, it was heavy. And all we had was this little tiny church called Grace Community Church, where there was probably about 20 to 30 people at the time—most of whom were the outcasts from the other churches. And we had this crazy lead pastor named Pastor Chip Bennett. There were no other adults my age there at the time. I mean, this isn't what I planned to be at. This isn't what I had expected that things were going to look like. This was my Malta moment.

And so we decided to stay for whatever reason. And I remember making the decision to stay in Florida. And so I stayed, and I just served at the church. And eventually, I came on staff at the church. And you might hear that and you go, "Well, that sounds like things were working out." And on one hand, yeah, it was. But man, it was hard. And if you've been in ministry before, you know it can be really tough—so hard that I remember there were moments where I just wanted to

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leave. In fact, there were moments where I packed up my entire office, and I was just ready to quit. Moments where I looked at God and said, “God, what are you doing? This isn’t what I planned, and this is too hard. I don’t want to go through this.” And every time I was ready to leave, God put someone or something in my path, as if God was saying, “Not yet. Not yet.” What are the chances?

And so fast-forwarding through the story, here we are 15 years later. I’m 33 years old, and I’m serving as the campus pastor of that same little church—that little life-saving station that grew. I met my wife here, and we have two beautiful daughters. My mom, who went through that significant financial strain, she’s now flourishing. She met her husband here at Grace. I got to officiate their wedding. But more than all of that, over the last 15 years, I’ve seen God use my life in ways that I never would have planned—that if I had written the story the way I wanted to write the story, I never would have written it this way. But God’s way is better. It’s just better.

And all I did—all I did was stay. All I did was serve. All I did was just try to stay faithful with what was in front of me. And it was in that that I found that maybe my Malta moment wasn’t a mistake. Maybe this was exactly where I needed to be. And maybe it was part of the mission.

And some of you, maybe you hear that story—and again, I don’t share that for the applause. I’m not sharing that so that you can hear how great I am. I don’t know what I’m doing half the time. But I’m sharing that to say maybe your story doesn’t look like mine. Maybe your story doesn’t look like Paul’s. But if you are here today, or if you are tuning in online, then God is not finished writing your story. And no matter how many red lights you hit, no matter how off-plan things feel, let me reassure you that God is still at work. Because that’s who he is.

And so we’re going to sing a final song. And as we sing the song, there’s a part in the song that says, “Your way is better.” And what I want to ask you to do—don’t sing that just because the lyrics are up there on the screen. I want you to sing it like you mean it. Sing it in faith. Even if you don’t see it right now, even if you don’t feel it right now, even if you don’t know the words—this is your moment, your surrender moment. This is your time to trust God again, even in your Malta moment.