

What to Do When You Find Yourself in an Unexpected Place

I'm fascinated with "chance encounters." History is full of them. And so is your life.

- Ever made a left turn when you should've gone right?
- Ever knocked on the wrong door?
- Ever stood in a long line only to discover 30 minutes later you were in the wrong line?

We don't usually see these as life-changing encounters. But they could be. We may miss them for what they could be because we're too busy complaining that we took a wrong turn ... knocked on the wrong door ... stood in the wrong line.

James Chadwick stood in the wrong line—and science is glad he did.

James Chadwick was only sixteen when he enrolled at Manchester University. This young upstart had his eye on studying mathematics—until he got in the wrong line.



Kids these days don't appreciate the work it used to take to enroll in classes every semester. These days, they lie in bed, munch on a Pop Tart, and choose their classes over the Internet.

They're done before they ever get to the second Pop-Tart. But back in the day, you had to walk from station to station, sometimes from building to building, to sign up for each class you needed. That was my experience in 1976.

Chadwick faced a similar routine in 1907. He got in line to register for mathematics, but it turns out he was registering for physics. He decided to stay enrolled, though, because he liked the professor he talked with: Dr. Ernest Rutherford.



This wrong line and chance encounter led to a lifelong friendship and partnership. Was that a big deal? Well, yeah. Rutherford, who mapped

out the atom, instilled in Chadwick a love for physics. Chadwick went on to discover the neutron and became a pioneer in nuclear science.

All because of the mistake of getting in the wrong line.

I'm not going to tell you that every mistake or wrong turn in your life is divinely ordained by God. But since you're there, look around. God may want to use you in that situation.

- Does He want to teach you something in the place you find yourself?
- Does He want you to talk to ... pray with ... encourage someone you encounter?
- Does He want you to help or serve someone else?

Maybe. Maybe not. Just don't assume your mistake is just that: a mistake. That mistake could be an opportunity.

Esther was a young Jewish woman in the Persian city of Susa. It was not her choice, but she was taken by force into the king's harem. She was an unwillingly participant in a royal beauty contest. It's not where she wanted to be, but God used her in those circumstances. As I read the Book of Esther, it is clear to me that God was at work behind the scenes.

So whether you end up in an unexpected by accident or by force, let God use you.

The following verse pops into my head every morning when I first wake up. Seriously. *Every morning.*

"This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" ([Ps. 118:24](#)).

The truth of that verse really sets my mood. But let me modify it. (*Pryorphrase it, if you will.*)

*"This is the **moment** the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."*

See those wrong turns and "chance encounters" with a random person as opportunities. Seize the moment.

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