

The Third Attempt – A Postscript in His Hand

Part IV – The Unplanned Closing of a Trilogy, and of a Decade

A Theology of Delay and the Discipline of Becoming

A Personal Reflection by Mathias Etsey Edor in August 2026

This reflection is the final, unplanned movement of a four-part autobiographical arc charting a Decade of Becoming (2015–2025). The first three parts named the fire. This one walks through the ash to see what it left standing.

Prologue: The Season of Formation

Torve mornings start before the heat does. The laterite is still cool then, red dust holding the last of the night, and a boy walks it toward a school that never once moved closer for his wanting it to. He does not count the miles. He has never seen a mile. He counts mornings; the only unit of distance a child without a bicycle has ever needed.

I was that boy. Ten years later I would stand in a hospital corridor in Ho, Ghana, three letters behind my name and a decade of somebody else's patience running through my blood, and I would recognize him instantly; not as a memory, but as a posture. The stubbornness that walked red roads before sunrise is the same stubbornness that, twenty years on, kept applying to the same residency program three times. Distance, it turns out, was never really the obstacle. Waiting was. I simply had not yet been introduced to how long waiting could last.

Between December 2015 and November 2025; a Decade of Becoming, I have come to call it, that boy became a physician, then a scientist, and then something closer to a builder: someone learning, slowly and often against his own impatience, to make the kind of thing that outlasts the person

who made it. Nested inside that decade was a shorter, and a harder season; January 2022 to December 2024, three years I have started calling the triennium, only because "the years everything I wanted went quiet" does not fit on a title page.

I write this in August 2026, with a clarity I did not have while any of it was happening. Clarity, I have learned, is almost always retrospective; it arrives after the door, never before it. What follows is the story of three attempts at one door, and of a man remade, attempt by attempt, into someone able to walk through it once it finally opened.

This piece was not planned. Between September and November 2025, I had already written what I believed was a finished testimony, in three parts: **Part I: From Rural Ghana to Global Recognition** – A Triennium of Grace, Growth, Grit, and God’s Guidance (**September 30, 2025**), which mapped the geography of the becoming; **Part II: Boldly Becoming** – A Decade of Faith and Fire (**October 31, 2025**), which named the fire without apologizing for it; and **Part III: When God Writes Your Memoir** – A Tricennium of Pen and Providence (**November 30, 2025**), which I genuinely believed, at the time, was the last word. I was wrong. The manuscript had one more chapter in it, and it would not be written until **August 2026**; some nine months later, and to my thirty-first year, not my twenty-ninth. This, then, is **Part IV: The Third Attempt** – A Postscript in His Hand (**August 31, 2026**). Unplanned. Unscheduled. And, for exactly that reason, probably the most honest of the four; the piece that did not get composed so much as it arrived, the way true endings usually do: quietly, after the book has already been called finished, and even shared.

I. The First Attempt – When Rejection Is Silent

September 2024

On Friday, February 16, 2024, I sat and passed the West African College of Surgeons Primary Examination in Surgery. It mattered. Surgery had asked years of disciplined pursuit of me, and that pass was hard proof; to the profession, and more quietly to myself, that I could walk the surgical path with competence.

But underneath that achievement sat a stubborn, quieter conviction that would not leave me alone: my long obedience was not going to be to the operating theatre, but to the systems that decide who ends up on the operating table in the first place. So, in what some around me read as an abrupt pivot, I applied in **April 2024** to the Ghana College of Physicians and Surgeons Public Health Residency, a two-year membership pathway. My Master of Public Health, completed at the University of Ghana in August 2023, was the foundation of that application; my formal graduation that same month in 2024 cleared the last prerequisite for a residency due to begin that September. I sat the entrance examination and interview on Tuesday, May 21, 2024, and was shortlisted to proceed that same afternoon. There was momentum. There was hope.

Then there was nothing.

No letter. No feedback. No closure. Weeks became three months. I learned about other people's admission letters the way you learn most painful things in a small professional world; sideways, through other people, before anyone has the decency to tell you directly. A colleague mentioned, mid-sentence and without meaning any harm by it, that she'd heard so-and-so had been admitted. Someone forwarded a screenshot meant for a group chat I wasn't in. By late July, and into early August 2024; I had pieced together, from other people's good news, the shape of my own absence.

I remember one particular night near the end of that August (in 2024) with more clarity than I remember most of the good ones. I was sitting on the edge of my bed, phone in hand, screen

brightness turned all the way down so the light wouldn't wake anyone, scrolling through nothing in particular because I had already called everyone whose voice might have made the silence bearable, and there was no one left. I did not cry. I remember being almost offended by how much I wanted to. I typed my mother's name into my contacts twice and put the phone down twice, because I did not yet have language for what I would be telling her, and a son does not call his mother to hand her an absence.

By August 31, 2024, the silence had said what no letter ever would. I had not been admitted.

There was no explanation to argue with, no rejection to appeal; only absence, which is its own particular cruelty, because you cannot negotiate with something that was never addressed to you. I grieved privately, not dramatically, but in the specific, exhausting way you grieve something that was never merely a career but a calling, which means the failure implicates identity, not just ambition. I did not, in that hour, doubt God. I doubted whether I had heard Him correctly. That is a harder, lonelier doubt than it sounds, and I would not wish it on anyone still standing in front of their own closed door. A testimony that remembers only its resolutions is not yet a whole testimony. This belongs in it too.

II. The Second Attempt – Excellence Without Entrance

August 2025

2025 would become one of the most defining years of my Decade of Becoming; global exposure through the Mandela Washington Fellowship in the United States, intellectual sharpening, spiritual deepening, and the particular kind of clarity that only distance from home seems able to produce.

Before departing for Arizona State University on Tuesday, June 17, 2025, I had already applied a second time to the same residency. I sat the entrance examination on Tuesday, May 20, 2025, and

walked into an interview the next day that I believed, with good reason, had gone well. I felt sturdier this time; less a supplicant hoping to be chosen, more a colleague introducing himself.

I let myself believe, perhaps naively, that fairness would now assert itself; that one denial, followed by visible growth, would surely be answered with an open door. I had earned that hope honestly: I had given the examination my best, performed well at interview by my own careful reckoning, matured both professionally and personally, and arrived at this second attempt as a Mandela Washington Fellow with doctoral research already underway and a career that had, by then, committed itself unambiguously to this field.

While I was in Arizona in the US, the same whispers reached me by late June and early July of 2025; admission letters were already circulating at home. I remember exactly where I was the afternoon the first of those whispers reached me: standing in a parking lot outside a lecture hall on ASU's Downtown Phoenix campus, heat coming up off the asphalt in visible waves, laughing at something a fellow Fellow from Kenya had just said, phone buzzing against my leg with a message that would end that laugh mid-breath. I read it standing exactly where I was. I put the phone away and walked back inside to the lecture, because there was nowhere else useful to put the feeling, and because a room full of people who had come from difficult places to be there deserved a version of me that was still present.

That July, surrounded by an extraordinary cohort of young African leaders, I carried two truths at once; a public joy in the company I kept, and a private ache in the door still shut behind me, seven thousand miles away. I celebrated outwardly. I wrestled inwardly, mostly at night, mostly alone, in the specific silence of a dorm room in a country where no one around me yet knew there was anything to wrestle with.

By July 31, 2025, clarity returned a second time, and it was no kinder than the first: I had not been admitted.

The second rejection wounds differently than the first. The first you can rationalize; bad timing, an off day, an imperfect system. The second does not let you hide behind circumstance. It asks, quietly and persistently, whether you are actually called, or whether you have simply been stubborn in public about a private guess. It tempts you toward the safer, already-proven road of surgery, where competence had already been demonstrated and respectability was simply waiting to be claimed.

Something in me refused to turn back; not out of pride, I want to be honest, but because I genuinely did not know how to want anything else by then. I had not left surgery because I had failed at it; I had left it because I had seen further than it alone could take me, and you cannot unsee a further thing just because the nearer thing would be easier. So I stayed the course, and slowly, without noticing the exact day it happened, I matured.

III. The Third Attempt – Alignment Without Anxiety

July 2026

By April 2026, something in me had genuinely shifted. I was no longer applying to prove myself. I was applying because I belonged; a distinction invisible from the outside and, I now believe, decisive on the inside. It is the entire difference between striving and arriving.

I have started thinking of it as the difference between two clocks. Public health and academic systems run on Chronos; sequential, calendar time, measured in deadlines and cycles and years. My formation, I have come to see, was running on something else entirely: Kairos, the appointed time that does not check a calendar before arriving. The institution could only ever offer me

Chronos. What I had actually been waiting for was Kairos, and no amount of impatience on my part was ever going to make the two coincide before they were ready to.

On Tuesday morning, May 19, 2026, at 9:30 a.m., I sat for my third entrance examination. That afternoon, at 1:30 p.m., I walked into my third interview; the same structure, almost symmetrically, as my very first attempt two years earlier. I was shortlisted to proceed, as I had been both times before. But this time was different in a way I felt long before I could explain it. I remember the walk down the corridor to the interview room: I was not rehearsing answers. I was noticing, instead, that my hands weren't cold, that my breathing hadn't changed, that I was curious about the panel rather than afraid of them. I sat down and looked across the table not at judges weighing my worth, but at people I simply hadn't yet had the chance to work alongside. It was the first time in three attempts that the room felt like a beginning instead of a test.

The Outcome – When Delay Becomes Design

The letter arrived at about 9:30 p.m. on Monday, July 20, 2026. I was at my desk, mid-sentence in something unrelated, when the notification came through. I remember reading the subject line twice before I let myself open it, the way you check a pot is actually boiling before you trust the sound of it. It was an admission letter. After three attempts, two silences, and one very long decade, it was, finally, an admission letter.

I did not cry, and I did not shout. I sat very still for a moment, the way you do when something you have wanted for so long finally arrives and your body isn't sure, yet, how to hold it. It felt less like a victory than an alignment; as if something that had always been true had simply, finally, been confirmed on paper.

By then I was also closing in on the final stretch of my doctoral studies in Public Health, with a specialization in Family and Reproductive Health, at the University of Health and Allied Sciences in Ho. I expect, God willing, to defend my thesis and graduate by June 30, 2027. The two timelines converging the way they did was not, I am convinced, an accident. It was orchestration. What July 2024 denied prematurely, and July 2025 delayed strategically, July 2026 delivered; precisely on time. I understand now that the delay was never punishment. It was preparation, measured with a precision I could only ever recognize from the far side of it.

The Theology of Delay

Looking back across the full arc, I no longer see those two rejections as interruptions to my formation. They were instruments of it. They burned away a quiet entitlement I hadn't known I was carrying. They deepened a dependence on God that performance alone could never have produced. They clarified motives that ambition tends to blur. Had I been admitted in 2024, I would have entered as a competent candidate. In 2026 I entered as a formed one; not because I have arrived at anything final, but because I stopped needing the letter to tell me who I was before I opened it. There is a real difference between qualification and readiness, and I no longer believe God was testing my intelligence in those two years. I think He was doing something slower and more patient with the parts of me no examination could see.

On Silence and Systems

I want to name one more thing plainly, without softening it and without turning it into grievance: for every candidate who is denied admission after the visible investment of examination, shortlisting, and interview, clear communication is not a courtesy. It is a structural obligation. Even a single line of closure changes what a rejection costs a person. Silence does not just delay

information; it prolongs grief in a way that honesty never does. Where there is clarity, disappointment becomes survivable, even instructive. Where there is only ambiguity, hope is left to rot in the space an institution declined to fill.

This is the conviction I carry forward as someone who hopes to help build and reform health systems rather than merely pass through them: behind every application number is a story, a family that has invested in that story, and often a prayer that has walked alongside it the whole way. Efficiency and humanity are not in tension. A system can hold its standards and still be generous with its communication. This is not criticism aimed backward. It is a promise aimed forward; to the applicants who will one day stand exactly where I once stood, that wherever I am positioned to shape such systems, I will close doors, when I must, with the same clarity I once needed extended to me.

Gratitude, Calling, and Covenant

I remain, at the close of this, simply and deeply grateful: to God, who authored every turn of this; to my parents, Mrs. Lucy Edor and Mr. Aloysius Edor, whose prayers across this decade I will spend the rest of my life discovering the answers to; to my mentors, Prof. Samuel Adams, Prof. Emmanuel Morhe, and Prof. Joe Nat Clegg-Lampsey, who sharpened my thinking before I could see clearly for myself; to the colleagues, friends, and loved ones who carried me through seasons I could not have carried alone; to the institutions that, knowingly or not, strengthened my resolve even where they delayed my entry; to Ghana, whose health systems I have long hoped to help build; and to the wider human family whose dignity is, quietly, the reason for all of this work.

This admission is not simply a career milestone. It is a covenant renewed; to serve my country, to protect populations whose vulnerability is too often structural rather than incidental, to integrate

faith and excellence without apologizing for either, and to honor Christ in both scholarship and service. That calling is already taking a specific shape: research and practice trained on the exact points along the family and reproductive-health pathway where it is systems, not individuals, that most often fail. A calling that never becomes a specific task was never fully obeyed.

Invitation – Beyond the Story

Read on its own, this might sound like a simple story of perseverance rewarded. It is not only that. It is the fourth and closing panel of what began, unassumingly, as three. None of the three anticipated a fourth. Yet here it is, arriving exactly where a fourth was needed.

There was the six-and-a-half-year medical school journey, August 2014 to November 2020, first written about in the UGMS 2020 Coronation magazine and shared again publicly in May 2025. There was a season nearly a year long, December 2023 to September 2024, of working without salary: rent still due, transport still needed, the same coat worn to work each morning long after it had stopped looking new; a quiet test of endurance that taught me more about calling than almost anything else has, precisely because no one was watching closely enough to call it sacrifice. And there was the pursuit of three master's degrees within two years, August 2022 to July 2024, undertaken while I was still learning to carry visibility without letting it define me.

Viewed together, a single pattern emerges: this was never only about examinations, or degrees, or residency placements. It was about formation. The Decade of Becoming was never a sprint measured in speed. It was an excavation measured in depth.

Epilogue – Three Attempts, One Calling

Now, in August 2026, preparing to complete my doctoral studies at the University of Health and

Allied Sciences in Ho, and to begin residency training at the Ghana College of Physicians and Surgeons on September 1, 2026, I stand not triumphant, but grateful; which I have come to learn is the more durable of the two postures. I have kept the hours and dates throughout this telling not for their own sake, but because they were the actual texture of the waiting. I leave them in, aware that this kind of precision is its own quiet form of prayer, even where only I will ever feel the full weight each of those hours once carried.

Grateful for the delays. Grateful for the denials. Grateful for the discipline they quietly imposed, and for the waiting that turned out not to be empty, but the place where the load-bearing parts of a life get built without anyone watching. Grateful, finally, for the door that opened exactly when it needed to, and not a day before.

And so, four pieces after the first, the arc closes precisely where it must; not with a period, but with a door. December 2015 to November 2025: a decade, kept whole. Twenty to thirty: the whole of a man's twenties, spent well. What began as three publications insisted, in the fullness of time, on a fourth, because the truest stories are rarely finished by their authors alone. They are finished by their Author, on a date He alone was keeping. This is that date. The dirt roads of Torve, where this decade began, and the corridors of Ho Teaching Hospital, where it now continues, are, I have come to see, the same road. Only further along.

Four Pieces. Three Attempts. Two Rejections. One Calling.
And A God Who Writes Beautifully, Though Never Hurriedly, Yet Always Faithfully, Forever.

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