

## **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 on August 31, 2026.**

Note: This reflection serves as the final, unplanned movement of a four-part autobiographical arc charting a Decade of Becoming (2015–2025). While the prior three chapters named the fire, this chapter addresses the architecture left behind in the ash.

#### **Prologue: The Season of Formation**

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There are decades that pass quietly, and there are decades that pass through you. The ten years between **December 2015** and **November 2025** were, for me, the latter: a Decade of Becoming, broad and unrelenting, in which a boy from rural Ghana (Torve), who once measured the distance to school not in miles but in mornings, walking red laterite roads before the heat rose off them was slowly remade into a physician, a scientist, a scholar; and something else besides, though I am still careful about naming that last one. I have watched what the decade built in me; I am less sure I am allowed to call it by name myself. Nested within that decade was a smaller, fiercer season: **the triennium** from **January 2022** to **December 2024**, three years that did not simply shape me but stretched me across the rack of destiny, until what remained was no longer ambition but architecture.

Together, these two seasons: the long and the intense, the slow burn and the crucible; form the defining passage of my formation. They were years in which identity was not declared but interrogated; years in which ambition was not celebrated but disciplined into purpose; years in which God, I have come to believe, did not simply withhold doors but stood watching to see whether I would still knock once the knocking stopped being applauded.

I write this now, on **Monday, August 31, 2026**, with a clarity that eluded me while I was living it. What follows is the story of three attempts at one door; and of a man being trained, attempt by attempt, into someone capable of walking through it.

This piece was not planned. Between September and November of 2025, I had already set down what I believed to be a complete 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 traced 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 intended, at the time, as the final word. I did not know, in November 2025, that the manuscript had one more chapter left in it, or that its writing would fall to August of 2026, some nine months later, and to my thirty-first year rather than my twenty-ninth. This, then, is **Part IV: The Third Attempt** – A Postscript in His Hand (**August 31, 2026**), unplanned, unscheduled, and for that reason perhaps the most honest of the four; the piece that was not composed so much as it arrived, the way true endings often do, quietly, after the book has already been called finished and even published.

## **I. The First Attempt – When Rejection Is Silent**

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*September 2024*

On Friday, February 16, 2024, I sat and passed the West African College of Surgeons Primary Examination in Surgery. It was not a small thing. Surgery had demanded years of disciplined pursuit, and that pass was hard evidence; to the profession, and to myself, that I could walk the surgical path with competence.

But beneath that achievement lived a quieter, more stubborn conviction: that my long obedience would not be to the operating theatre, but to the systems that determine who ends up on the operating table in the first place. My calling, I had come to suspect, belonged to public health; to

populations and families rather than patients alone, to preventive and social medicine rather than only cure, to the architecture of health and its systems rather than its emergency repair.

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, shorter than the customary three years required of most other specialties. My Master of Public Health, completed at the University of Ghana, Legon, in **August 2023**, was the foundation of that application; my formal graduation in **August 2024** then fulfilled the final prerequisite for a residency set to begin that **September, 2024**. I sat the entrance examination and interview on **Tuesday, May 21, 2024**; I gave the morning my fullest effort, and by that same afternoon I had been shortlisted to proceed. There was momentum. There was hope.

Then there was silence.

No letter. No feedback. No closure. Weeks became three months. Whispers began moving through the corridors of colleagues before they ever reached me directly; admission letters arriving for others by the end of **July**, and even in early **August 2024**. Screenshots passed quietly from phone to phone; the particular loneliness of watching a door close for you while it opens, audibly, for everyone else. I waited as I had been taught to wait: with dignity, with faith, with a restraint that cost more than it ever showed.

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. It was here that I learned one of the earliest and most enduring lessons of delayed doors: rejection does not always announce itself. Sometimes it simply withholds, and lets you arrive at the truth on your own. I grieved privately; not dramatically, but deeply, in the way one grieves something that was never merely a career but a calling, and which therefore implicates not just ambition but identity.

There is a memory from that August that time has not smoothed into anecdote: sitting alone with my phone silent in my hand, no name left to call, because I had already called everyone whose voice might have made the silence bearable. I did not, in that hour, doubt God. I doubted whether I had heard Him correctly; a harder, lonelier doubt, and one I would not wish on anyone still standing before their own closed door. A testimony that remembers only its resolutions is not yet a whole testimony. This, too, belongs in it.

## II. The Second Attempt – Excellence Without Entrance

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### *August 2025*

2025 would become one of the most defining years of my Decade of Becoming; a year of global exposure through the Mandela Washington Fellowship in the USA, of intellectual sharpening, of spiritual deepening, and of the kind of reflection that only distance from home can produce.

Before departing for Arizona State University on Tuesday, June 17, 2025, I had already applied, again; to the same Public Health Residency. On **Tuesday, May 20, 2025**, I sat my second entrance examination; the following day, **Wednesday, May 21, 2025**, I walked into an interview I believed, with good reason, had gone well. I felt sturdier this time. Less a supplicant, more a colleague.

I allowed myself, perhaps naively, to believe that fairness would now assert itself; that one denial, followed by visible growth, would surely be answered with an open door. While in the United States, the same whispers reached me by end of **June** and early **July 2025**: admission letters were already circulating. This time, I let myself hope openly, and I had reasons to:

- I had given the examination my best.
- I had performed well, by my own honest reading, at interview.
- I had matured, professionally and personally.
- I was now a Mandela Washington Fellow.
- I held advanced degrees, with doctoral research in public health already underway.

- And my career had, by then, committed itself unambiguously to this field.

Surely, I told myself, this was the season.

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 confronts the self directly. It does not ask whether you prepared well; it asks, quietly and persistently, whether you are truly called. 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.

But something in me refused to turn back. I had discerned, with a clarity I could not argue myself out of, that my long obedience lay in public health: in family and reproductive health research, in governance and systems and policy; and I had not left surgery because I had failed at it, but because I had seen further than it alone could take me. So I stayed the course. That July (of 2025), surrounded in Arizona by a cohort of extraordinary young leaders from across the continent (of Africa), 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. The Arizona sun was relentless and bright that July, the kind of light that makes a desert look endless; and against it, half a world away, the silence of the admissions cycle at home sat like a shadow no amount of daylight could reach. I celebrated outwardly. I wrestled inwardly. And, slowly, I matured.

### **III. The Third Attempt – Alignment Without Anxiety**

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*July 2026*

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

Public health and academic systems run on Chronos: sequential, calendar time, measured in deadlines and application cycles and years. My formation, I have come to see, ran on a different clock entirely; on Kairos, the opportune and appointed time that does not consult a calendar before arriving. The institution I applied to could only ever offer me Chronos. What I had actually been waiting for was Kairos, and no amount of impatience on my part could have made the two coincide before they were ready to.

The first two attempts had carried beneath them a current of anxiety, an unspoken urgency to be validated by an institution. The third attempt carried something else entirely: a calm, settled resolve. On **Tuesday morning, May 19, 2026**, at 9:30 a.m., I sat for my third entrance examination; that same afternoon, at approximately 1:30 p.m., I walked into my third interview; the structure mirroring, almost symmetrically, my very first attempt exactly two years earlier. As in both prior years, I was shortlisted to proceed.

But this interview was different in a way I felt rather than reasoned. It was unforced, almost organic; less a performance than a conversation that had simply been waiting to happen. Where the earlier attempts had carried the brittle tension of hoping to be chosen, this one carried a quiet, settled conviction that I was already where I belonged. I remember the specific, ordinary calm of that morning, and I remember distrusting it; waiting, almost superstitiously, for the old panic to arrive and explain itself, the way it always had before. It did not come. I did not, in the room, know what to make of its absence, and I am not sure I fully know now. I only know I left that morning without the familiar ache of having performed for people who might say no.

### **The Outcome – When Delay Becomes Design**

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At about 9:30 p.m. on **Monday, July 20, 2026** the letter finally arrived.

An admission letter. After three solid attempts. Not dramatic, not theatrical; only sacred, in the quiet way that answered prayers tend to be. It felt less like a victory than an alignment, as though 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 complete my research, defend my thesis and graduate by **June 30, 2027**; bringing to completion a journey of scholarship, discipline, perseverance, purposeful service and unwavering commitment. The convergence of these timelines was not, I am convinced, accidental. It was orchestration.

What **July 2024** denied prematurely, and what **July 2025** delayed strategically, **July 2026** delivered; purposefully, and precisely on time. The delay, I now understand, was never punishment. It was preparation, measured out with a precision I could only recognize in hindsight.

### **The Theology of Delay**

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Looking back across the full arc, I can see that those two rejections were not interruptions to my formation; they were instruments of it. They burned away a quiet entitlement I had not known I carried. They deepened a dependence on God that performance alone could never have produced. They clarified motives that ambition tends to obscure. They strengthened a resilience no single success could have built. And they refined an identity that no longer needed an admission letter to feel complete.

Had I been admitted in 2024, I would likely have entered a competent candidate, impatient and mostly unbruised. I do not know what to call the man who entered instead in 2026; only that he carried doubts 2024 never had time to teach him, and had learned, somewhere in the waiting, to distrust his own certainty about what God was doing. If that is readiness, it did not feel like arrival. It felt, more often, like being slowly made able to carry what I had already been carrying badly.

## On Silence and Systems

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There is, however, a reflection here that must be offered gently but without softening its substance; not as grievance, but as the kind of structural critique a systems reformer owes the institutions he hopes one day to serve and strengthen.

Selection processes are never merely administrative events. They are human crossroads, occurring at scale, multiplied across hundreds of applicants whose individual stories an institution will rarely have the occasion to see. For every candidate denied admission: particularly after the visible investment of examination, shortlisting, and interview; clear communication is not a courtesy; it is a structural obligation. Even brief feedback. Even a single line of closure. Silence, however unintentional, prolongs grief in a way that transparency never would. Institutional silence does not only demoralize the applicant; it diminishes the moral authority of the institution itself, since true excellence requires a system to be as meticulous in its rejections as it is celebrated in its admissions. Where there is clarity, disappointment becomes survivable, even instructive. Where there is ambiguity, hope is left to fester painfully in the space an institution declined to fill.

This is the conviction I carry forward as someone who intends to build and reform health systems, not merely pass through them: institutions of excellence must remember that behind every application number sits a story, a family that has invested in that story, a calling that predates the application, and often a prayer that has accompanied it. Efficiency and humanity are not in tension. A system can be rigorous in its standards and still be generous in its communication; it can protect its thresholds without abandoning the people standing at them. This is not criticism aimed backward; it is compassion aimed forward, toward the applicants who will one day stand where I once stood, and a quiet commitment that wherever I am positioned to shape such systems in future, I will choose to close doors, when I must, with the same clarity I would want extended to me. I have come to think of this as restorative bureaucracy: administration that treats transparency

not as a courtesy extended to applicants but as an asset the institution owes itself, closing every door with the same rigor and humanity it brings to opening one.

### **Gratitude, Calling, and Covenant**

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I remain, at the close of this passage, simply and deeply grateful: to God, who authored every turn of this journey; to my parents (Mrs Lucy Tetteh Edor and Mr. Aloysuis Kwabla Edor), whose prayers across this decade I will never be able to fully measure, only to keep discovering their answers; to the mentors (Prof. Samuel Adams, Prof. Emmanuel Morhe and Prof. Joe Nat Clegg-Lampsey) who sharpened my thinking when I could not yet see clearly for myself; to the many colleagues, friends and loved ones whose encouragement 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 serve and help build; and to the wider human family, whose dignity is the quiet engine behind all of this work.

This admission, then, is not merely a career milestone. It is a covenant renewed; a recommitment to serve my country, to protect populations whose vulnerability is too often structural rather than incidental, to integrate faith and excellence without apology, and to honor Christ in both scholarship and service. Concretely, that calling is already taking shape: research and practice trained on the points along the family and reproductive-health pathway where it is systems, not individuals, that most often fail – because a calling that never becomes a specific task was never fully obeyed.

### **Invitation – Beyond the Story**

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Read in isolation, this may sound like a simple story of perseverance rewarded. It is not only that. It is the fourth and closing panel of a tetralogy that began, unassumingly, as three; the three parts named above. None of the three anticipated a fourth at the time of writing. Yet here it is, arriving

precisely where a fourth was needed, spanning several defining experiences that, together, explain why none of this surprised me as much as it might have surprised an observer.

There was the six-and-a-half-year medical school journey, from August 2014 to November 2020 – first written and published in the UGMS 2020 Coronation magazine in September 2020, and shared again publicly in May 2025. There was, too, a season nearly a year long, from 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 and conviction 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, from August 2022 to July 2024, an intense stretch of intellectual and personal stretching undertaken while I was still discerning identity, purpose, and the particular discipline of carrying visibility without being undone by it. All of it unfolded within the same Decade of Becoming, spanning December 2015 to November 2025.

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 always an excavation measured in depth. If these pages have stirred something in you, I invite you not merely to read them, but to journey through the fuller reflections and autobiography from which they are drawn; where this story unfolds not as a sequence of isolated achievements, but as a continuous, ongoing surrender to purpose. Four parts, one arc: a trilogy that insisted, in the end, on becoming a quartet, because the truest stories rarely close on schedule; they close when the door does.

### **Epilogue – Three Attempts, One Calling**

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Now, on **August 31, 2026**, preparing to complete my doctoral studies and research in Public Health (Family and Reproductive Health specialization) at the University of Health and Allied

Sciences in Ho and to begin medical residency (and specialization) training in Public Health on **September 1, 2026** at the Ghana College of Physicians and Surgeons, I stand not triumphant, but grateful; which is, I have come to learn, the more durable posture of the two. I have kept the hours and the dates throughout this telling as closely as I have not for their own sake, but because they were the texture of the waiting; I leave them in, aware that such 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 imposed; for the waiting that proved not empty, but the place where the load-bearing parts of a life are built. Grateful, finally, for the door that opened exactly when it needed to, and not 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 of Becoming, kept whole. Twenty to thirty, the whole of a man's twenties, offered up unreservedly and 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. This is that word. This is the closing of the decade, and of the season beneath it. 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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**Monday, August 31, 2026**