SHOW ME MERCY

A CHRISTIAN NOVEL



Anthony Ijere

BOOKS BY ANTHONY IJERE

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And more...

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Dedication

For those who feel trapped by the choices that have shaped them. Those who walk in shame, who barter safety for survival, who whisper that there is no way out. This book is for you. May these pages be a quiet hand at your back: a witness that mistakes do not have the final word, that repair is slow but possible, and that a life can be rebuilt by one honest act at a time. You are not beyond mercy; you are not beyond a new beginning.

Preface

Thank you for picking up this book. I wrote it because I wanted to tell a story about ordinary people doing the hard work of repair: not dramatic miracles, but steady, sometimes messy choices that add up over time. If you've ever wondered whether a life can be rebuilt after a mistake, these pages are for you.

This is a story that moves between quiet moments and tense scenes, but it always returns to the small, human acts that make change possible. Mercy's path shows the slow work of making amends; Ify's shows how education and integrity can carry a promise forward. The market, the mentorship room, and the town are characters too—people who hold one another accountable and help one another heal.

Read it slowly if you can. Let the small scenes settle. Some chapters are dramatic; others are quiet. Both kinds matter. If a passage lands on you, pause and sit with it.

If this story finds a place in your heart, carry its questions with you and let them shape the way you live. Keep coming home.

Prologue

The pestle hit his head.

It made a dull, heavy sound. Emeka fell forward. The room went very quiet. Mercy stood still, the pestle in her hand. Her breath came fast. She did not mean for this to happen. They had argued. Old hurts came up. Then she swung, and everything changed.

She wrapped the pestle in a cloth. Her hands shook. She washed her face until the water ran cold. Then she ran out of the house.

The market was loud and crowded. Mercy moved through the stalls like someone hiding. She slipped past women selling plantain and men fixing nets. Her heart beat so hard she thought people would hear it. News travels fast in a small town. Someone shouted. A name was whispered. The police came.

She ran down alleys and over the bridge. Boots hit the ground behind her. Voices called. A hand grabbed at her sleeve and she pulled free. The blue uniforms were closer now. Panic filled her chest. She kept running.

What will be her fate? Will the police catch her? Will the town judge her? Will she be killed—by the law, by a crowd, or by a life that cannot be fixed? The questions chased her as fast as her feet.

Let’s find out how it all began.

Episode 1

It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness — Lamentations 3:22–23 KJV

The mirror in Mercy's room was cracked down the middle. She had not fixed it. She liked the way the cracks made her face look like a map—lines that told where she had been. She stood very still and watched her own eyes. They were hard and bright. They had learned to look first for danger and then for a way out.

Outside, the street was noisy. Men shouted about football. A motorbike rattled past. Children ran with bare feet and loud laughter. Mercy could hear the town living its small, ordinary life. She felt like a stranger in a place that had once been hers.

She touched the scar on her hand. It was a thin white line that ran from her thumb to her wrist. She had gotten it when she was twelve, stealing yams from a market stall. The stall owner had caught her and swung a stick. Mercy had fought back. She had learned then that pain could be turned into power. She had learned to take before anyone else could take her.

Her phone buzzed on the table. A message from Ify: Party tonight. You coming? Mercy smiled without joy. Parties were

easy. People drank and forgot. People let her lead them into things they would later regret. She had a way of making sin look like a game. She had a way of making people follow.

She sat down on the bed and let the room hold her. The walls were thin. The roof leaked when it rained. She had left home to study at the university. She had left because she wanted more than the small house and the long days of work. She had left because she wanted to be someone who could decide her own fate.

At the university she learned new words and new ways to move. She learned how to charm a man into paying for her food. She learned how to make friends who would do what she asked. She learned how to hide the hunger inside her with laughter and a bold face.

But the hunger did not go away. It grew different. It wanted more than food. It wanted power. It wanted to be feared and loved at the same time. Mercy liked that feeling. It made her feel alive.

She stood and walked to the window. The moon was a thin coin in the sky. A church bell rang somewhere far off. The sound made her think of Pastor Chike, a man she had met once at a funeral. He had a calm voice that did not shout. He had looked at her like he could see the place inside her that was empty. Mercy had felt uncomfortable under that look. She did not like people who saw too much.

She remembered the first time she heard a voice that was not her own. She was a child then, hiding under a blanket because her father had come home drunk. The voice had been soft and far away. Mercy, it had said. I am with you. She had thought it was the radio or the wind. She had not listened.

Now, years later, the voice came again. It was not loud. It was not a shout. It was a small, steady whisper that seemed to come from the place behind her ribs.

Turn away. Come home.

Mercy laughed, a short, sharp sound. She had learned to laugh at things that scared her. Laughing made them smaller. She told herself the voice was nothing. She had no time for voices that asked her to change. Change was for people who had the luxury of time and safety. Mercy had neither.

She put on her jacket and left the room. The night air hit her face like a slap. The market was still open. A man sold roasted plantain from a small fire. A woman called out the price of tomatoes. Mercy walked past them all and felt the old hunger rise. She wanted to be seen. She wanted to be wanted. She wanted to be in control.

At the party, the music was loud and the lights were bright. People moved close and laughed too loudly. Mercy moved through the crowd like a knife through cloth. She smiled at the right moments. She said the right things. Men offered drinks and money. Girls watched her and tried to copy her laugh.

Ify found her and hugged her like a sister. “You look good,” Ify said. “You always do.”

Mercy let the praise fall on her like rain. She liked the warmth. She liked the way people leaned on her for courage. She liked the way they followed.

A young man named Emeka watched her from across the room. He was quiet and polite. He had a steady look that did not try to take anything from her. Mercy noticed him because he did not try to impress her. That made him different. That made him interesting.

He came to her and spoke in a low voice. “You are Mercy, right?” he asked.

“Yes,” she said. “Who are you?”

“Emeka,” he said. “I study law. I like to read.”

Mercy smiled. “Reading is good,” she said. “But life is better.”

He laughed and did not argue. They talked until the music slowed and the party thinned. Emeka walked her home. He did not try to kiss her. He did not try to buy her. He walked beside her like a quiet promise.

When they reached her room, he said, “Can I see you again?”

Mercy looked at him. She had learned to say yes when it suited her and no when it did not. She had learned to use people like tools. But something in Emeka’s face made her want to be more

than a tool. She wanted to be seen as a person, not a map of scars.

“Maybe,” she said. “Maybe.”

He left with a small smile. Mercy closed the door and leaned against it. Her heart beat faster than she expected. She had not planned to feel anything. She had not planned to want.

That night, as she lay in bed, the voice came again. Mercy, come home. Let me show you mercy.

She turned her face to the dark and told herself she would not listen. She had survived by not listening. She had survived by being hard. Mercy had a name that sounded like kindness, but she had never let kindness touch her. She had used the name like a shield.

Outside, the church bell rang once more. Mercy thought of the word mercy and how it sounded like a soft thing. She thought of the people she had hurt and the things she had taken. She thought of the scar on her hand and the way it had felt when the stick hit her. She thought of the first time she had lied to get food.

She closed her eyes and prayed in the way she had learned from other people—quick words, a bargain with God. If you help me, I will change, she said. The words felt false even as she spoke them.

The voice did not answer with thunder. It answered with a quiet that filled the room. I will show you mercy, it seemed to say. But you must let me in.

Mercy turned away from the window and from the voice. She did not know how to let anyone in. She had built walls so high that even she could not climb them. She had learned to survive alone.

She slept and dreamed of a road that led to a house with a light on. In the dream, someone stood at the gate and waited. Mercy woke with the taste of salt in her mouth. She did not know if it was from tears or from the night air.

The next morning, she woke to the sound of children singing in the street. The song was simple and bright. Mercy listened and felt something like a small crack open inside her. It was not a breaking. It was not yet a healing. It was only the first light finding a place to rest.

She dressed and left the room. The mirror still had the crack. She looked at herself and for the first time in a long time she did not try to hide. She saw the lines and the scar and the tiredness. She said the name Mercy out loud and felt it roll in her mouth like a seed.

Maybe, she thought, mercy could be for her too. Maybe mercy was not only for people who had been good. Maybe mercy was for people who had been lost.

She walked into the street and the town moved around her. The voice was quiet, but it was there. She did not know what

would happen next. She only knew that a small thing had shifted. The road ahead was not clear. It would be hard. It would cost her. But for the first time she felt the pull of something other than herself.

She kept walking.

Note to the reader: Mercy's life is not a story of one night or one choice. It is a path made of many small steps. Sometimes the first step is only the willingness to listen. Be gentle with people who seem lost. Mercy is a reminder that no one is beyond the reach of God's mercy.

Short prayer: Lord, help us to hear your voice when it calls us home.

Scripture to remember: Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me — Psalm 51:10 KJV.

Episode 2

Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners — 1 Corinthians 15:33 KJV

The university felt like a different world. Big buildings, bright lights, and people who spoke like they had plans. Mercy liked the way the place made her feel important. Here she could be clever and loud and never have to explain where she came from.

She learned fast. She learned which teachers were strict and which ones could be softened with a smile. She learned which students had money and which ones had secrets. She learned how to make a room turn toward her when she walked in.

Ify followed her like a shadow. At first Ify copied Mercy because she wanted to be brave. Later she copied Mercy because she did not know how to be herself. Mercy did not mind. It felt good to be followed. It felt good to be the one who led.

One night Mercy and Ify went to a party in a rented hall. The music was loud and the lights were low. People drank and laughed and pretended their problems were small. Mercy moved through the crowd like a queen. She laughed at the right time. She touched shoulders and whispered jokes. People gave

her drinks. People gave her attention. People wanted to be near her.

A young man named Chike watched Mercy from the edge of the room. He was quiet and kind. He had a scholarship and a careful smile. Mercy noticed him because he did not try to impress her. That made him different. That made him interesting.

Chike came to talk to Ify, but Mercy stepped between them. "Ify, come dance," she said, and Ify went without thinking. Mercy liked the power of a small command. She liked the way people obeyed her without asking why.

Later, when the music slowed, a group of students sat on the steps outside. They talked about exams and money and the future. Mercy sat with them and told stories that made them laugh. She told stories that made them forget the hard parts of life. She told stories that made sin sound like a clever plan.

"Ify, you should come with me tomorrow," Mercy said to a girl who wanted to study. "There's a place where we can relax. You need a break."

Ify looked at her with trust. "Okay," she said. "I'll come."

The next day Ify missed a morning class. She missed the lecture that had the test questions. She missed the chance to ask the professor for help. Mercy did not go to class either. They sat in a small room and talked and drank and laughed. Mercy taught Ify how to make worry feel small.

Weeks passed and small things added up. Ify missed more classes. Her grades slipped. She stopped going to the study group that had helped her before. Mercy watched and felt a small pride. People followed her. She had influence. She could make someone change their path with a word.

But influence is a heavy thing. Mercy did not think about the weight. She thought about the power.

One afternoon, Mercy walked through the faculty lounge and heard a professor complain. “Some students are not serious,” he said. “They waste their time. They will fail.”

Mercy smiled to herself. He did not know the real reason. He did not know how she could make people forget. He did not know how she could make them feel brave for a night and lost the next day.

That night Mercy sat on the roof of the hostel and looked at the city lights. The wind was cool. The stars were small and steady. A voice came again, soft and patient.

Turn away. Choose life.

Mercy closed her eyes. She had heard that voice before. It had followed her like a shadow since she was a child. It had come in the quiet of a church and in the hush of a hospital room. It had come when she had been alone and afraid.

She told herself she was not afraid now. She told herself she had learned to survive. She told herself the voice was for people who could be gentle. Mercy had no time for gentleness.

Still, the voice would not leave. It came again the next morning when she woke to the sound of birds. Mercy, you can change. You can be free.

She put on her shoes and walked to class. On the way she saw Ify sitting on the steps, head in her hands. Mercy stopped. For a moment she felt something like a tug in her chest.

"Ify?" Mercy asked.

Ify looked up. Her eyes were red. "I failed the test," she said. "I missed the lecture. I thought I could catch up, but I couldn't."

Mercy felt a small cold inside. She had not meant for this. She had not thought about the cost. She had only wanted to be followed. She had only wanted to be admired.

"Don't worry," Mercy said quickly. "You can retake it. I'll help you."

Ify smiled weakly. "You will?"

"Of course," Mercy said. "We'll study tonight."

That night they did not study. They talked and drank and laughed. Mercy taught Ify how to forget the shame. Ify listened because she wanted to be brave. Mercy watched and felt the old hunger fill her again—the hunger to be wanted, to be in control.

A week later Ify's scholarship was at risk. She had missed too many classes. The dean called her in. Mercy heard about it and

felt a small panic. Ify was like a mirror. If Ify fell, it would show Mercy what she had done.

Mercy went to the dean's office. She sat in the waiting room and thought of what to say. She could lie. She could charm. She could make the dean feel sorry. She had done it before.

When the dean called Ify in, Mercy stood outside the door. She listened to the muffled voice. The dean spoke about responsibility and choices. Ify's voice trembled. Mercy felt a sharp thing in her chest. For the first time she saw the damage she caused.

She left before the meeting ended. She walked fast until the air felt like it could wash the guilt away. But guilt does not wash off like dust. It sits under the skin.

That night Mercy sat alone and thought of the voice that had followed her. Turn away. Choose life. She thought of Ify's face and the way the dean had spoken. She thought of the small, steady people who tried to live right.

She told herself she would change tomorrow. She told herself she would be kinder. She told herself she would help Ify study. But tomorrow came and Mercy found reasons to delay. She found parties and late nights and new faces. The voice waited.

One morning, a letter arrived for Ify. It was from the scholarship office. Ify opened it with shaking hands. Mercy watched as the color left Ify's face. The letter said the scholarship was suspended until Ify could prove she had improved her grades.

Ify looked at Mercy and the trust in her eyes was broken. "I thought you would help me," she said softly.

Mercy did not know what to say. She had wanted to be loved. She had wanted to be followed. She had not wanted to be the reason someone fell.

That night Mercy could not sleep. She walked the campus and the voice came again, clearer than before. You cannot keep taking. You must give back. You must change.

Mercy stopped and put her hand over her heart. The place under her ribs felt tight. She had built her life on taking. She had taken food, attention, respect, and people's futures. The thought of giving back felt like losing power.

She stood under a streetlight and for a moment the light made her look small. Mercy thought of the road she had walked. She thought of the first time she had stolen to eat. She thought of the way survival had become a habit.

The voice did not shout. It only said, Mercy, come home.

Mercy turned away and walked back to the hostel. She told herself she would start tomorrow. She told herself she would help Ify study. She told herself she would listen to the voice.

But tomorrow is a promise that can be broken. Mercy had learned to break promises to herself. The night swallowed her choices and the voice waited, patient as ever.

Note to the reader: Influence is a powerful thing. When we lead others, we must ask if we lead them toward life or toward

harm. Mercy's story shows how easy it is to pull someone down while thinking we are only having fun. Be careful who you follow and be careful who you lead.

Short prayer: Lord, give us wisdom to lead others well and the courage to change when we are wrong.

Scripture to remember: Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me — Psalm 51:10 KJV.

Episode 3

Scripture: What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder — Matthew 19:6 KJV

Mercy stood at the edge of the church and watched Emeka walk down the aisle. He looked calm, like a man who had learned to carry his own quiet. The white of his shirt was clean and simple. The church smelled of lilies and old wood. People she had known all her life sat in the pews, some with faces that were soft, some with faces that still held questions.

Her heart beat fast in a way she had not expected. She had not planned to marry. She had not planned to let anyone close enough to see the map of her scars. But Emeka had a way of looking at her that did not try to take anything from her. He did not want to own her. He wanted to walk with her.

Pastor Chike spoke about promises and about the weight of words. He spoke about mercy and about the way God meets people in the middle of their mess. Mercy listened and felt the words like rain on dry ground. For a moment she believed she could be different.

After the ceremony, people came to congratulate them. Ify hugged Mercy and whispered, "You look happy." Mercy smiled

and let the warmth fill her. She wanted to be happy. She wanted to be the kind of woman who could keep a promise.

The first months of marriage were soft. Emeka rose early to study law and came home with small gifts—a loaf of bread, a new pen, a story about a case he had read. He did not demand much. He asked about her day and listened when she spoke. Mercy found herself telling him things she had never told anyone: the way she had stolen yams as a child, the nights she had slept hungry, the men who had used her and left. Emeka did not flinch. He only took her hand and said, "Thank you for trusting me."

Trust felt like a new language. Mercy tried to speak it. She tried to let him in. She cooked the meals she had learned from Mama Uche. She swept the small house and hung the clothes to dry. Sometimes she would catch herself smiling at nothing, and she would think, Maybe this is what peace looks like.

But old habits are like roots. They grow deep and do not die quickly. Mercy had learned to take when she needed. She had learned to fight when she was afraid. She had learned to make people fear her so they would not hurt her first. Those lessons did not leave because she said vows.

One evening Emeka came home late. He had been at the law library, he said, helping a friend with a brief. Mercy had waited for him and had made stew. The pot had cooled on the stove. When he walked in, he smelled of other people and of the night.

"Where were you?" Mercy asked, more sharp than she meant.

"At the library," Emeka said. "I told you. I had to finish a paper."

Mercy watched him. She wanted to believe him. She wanted to trust. But a small voice inside her—older than the voice that asked her to come home—whispered that people lied. She had been lied to before. She had been used.

"You could have called," she said.

Emeka looked tired. "My phone died," he said. "I'm sorry."

Mercy's anger rose like a tide. It was not only about the phone. It was about every time she had been left, every time she had been laughed at, every time she had had to take for herself. She wanted to punish him for the past that had nothing to do with him.

She slammed a plate on the table. The sound was small but it broke the quiet. Emeka flinched. He did not shout. He only stood and watched her with a sadness that made her chest hurt.

"Why do you do this?" he asked softly. "Why do you push me away when I try to come close?"

Mercy did not know how to answer. She had no words for the fear that lived under her anger. She had no words for the shame that told her she did not deserve kindness. So she said something sharp and walked out into the night.

Outside, the street was empty and the moon was thin. Mercy walked until her legs ached. She wanted to run. She wanted to disappear. She wanted to be the woman she had been before anyone could touch her heart. But the thought of Emeka waiting

at home made her stop. She did not want to lose him. She did not want to be alone again.

When she returned, Emeka was sitting at the table with a small lamp. He had not eaten. He looked up when she came in and smiled, but the smile did not reach his eyes.

"Come sit," he said. "Let's talk."

They talked until the lamp burned low. Mercy told him about the fear that rose when he was late. Emeka told her about the pressure of school and the way he wanted to be a good man for her. He did not blame her. He only asked for patience.

Mercy wanted to be patient. She tried. She prayed in the quiet of the night and asked God to help her. The voice she had heard since childhood came again, soft and steady. Let me show you mercy. Let me heal you.

She wanted to believe. She wanted to let the voice in. But the old hunger was loud. It wanted proof before trust. It wanted to be sure she would not be hurt again.

Days passed. Small things became tests. Emeka would speak to a neighbor and Mercy would watch the way the neighbor smiled. Emeka would laugh at a joke and Mercy would feel a sting. She began to watch him like a hawk, looking for signs of betrayal. Her eyes found small things and made them large.

Emeka noticed the change. He tried to be gentle. He tried to give her space and to hold her when she let him. But Mercy's anger had a way of returning like a storm. She would say things

she did not mean. She would accuse him of things he had not done. Each time she did, a small piece of the peace they had built cracked.

One afternoon, Mercy found a message on Emeka's phone from a classmate thanking him for help with a paper. The message was innocent. Mercy read it and felt the old fear explode. She confronted him in front of friends. Her voice was loud and sharp. People looked away. Emeka's face went pale.

"Why do you not trust me?" he asked later, when they were alone.

"Because I have been hurt," Mercy said. "Because I know what people do."

Emeka took her hands. "I am not them," he said. "I am here."

Mercy wanted to believe him. She wanted to stop the storm inside her. She wanted to be the woman who could receive love without breaking it. But the road from wanting to being is long. Mercy had to learn to let go of the old ways. She had to learn to let mercy touch her.

That night she knelt by the bed and prayed with a voice that trembled. She asked God to help her trust. She asked God to teach her how to be kind. The voice she had heard all her life answered not with words but with a peace that settled like a hand on her shoulder.

Mercy did not change in a single night. She still snapped and she still feared. But something had shifted. She had said the

promise out loud in the church. She had chosen to walk with Emeka. The promise was not only between two people; it was also a promise to herself to try.

Outside, the stars were steady. Mercy looked at them and felt small and brave at the same time. She did not know what the future would bring. She only knew that she had said yes. She had made a promise. Now she had to learn what it meant to keep it.

Note to the reader: A promise is more than words. It is a daily choice to be kind, to trust, and to forgive. Mercy's marriage shows that love asks us to face our past and to let healing begin. If you are in a relationship, remember that patience and truth build trust.

Short prayer: Lord, teach us to love with patience and to give mercy as we have received it.

Scripture to remember: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you — Ephesians 4:32 KJV.

Episode 4

Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath — Ephesians 4:26 KJV

Mercy had learned to read faces like books. She could tell when a man lied by the way his smile arrived late. She could tell when a woman hid fear by the way her hands trembled. So when she saw the message on Emeka's phone, the words did not need to be loud to be true.

It was a small thing at first: a name she did not know, a few words that looked like a secret. Mercy stood in the doorway of their small house and watched Emeka fold his shirt. He did not notice her. The light from the window cut across his back. He looked ordinary—tired, careful, the man who had promised to walk with her.

Her chest tightened. She moved closer and read the message again. It was not a joke. It was not a mistake. The words were clear enough to make her mouth go dry.

Mercy felt something cold and sharp open inside her. It was not only anger. It was shame and fear and a memory of every time she had been used. Her hands shook. She wanted to throw the phone. She wanted to shout. She wanted to make him feel the small, hot pain she had carried for years.

She did not speak. She watched him from the doorway while the room held its quiet. Emeka folded the shirt and put it in the drawer. He hummed a little tune she had never heard him hum before. He did not know she had seen the message.

That night at dinner the house felt small. Mercy ate slowly and watched him. He told her about a classmate who needed help with a brief. He talked about a paper and a meeting. His voice was steady. He did not know the storm that had begun to move in her.

After he left for the library, Mercy sat on the bed and let the dark come close. The voice she had heard since childhood whispered again, but this time it was not the voice of mercy. It was the voice of every hurt she had swallowed. You were right to be hard, it said. You were right to protect yourself.

She thought of the first time she had been betrayed—by a friend who had taken her food and laughed. She thought of the men who had promised and left. She thought of the nights she had cried into a pillow and told herself she would never be weak again.

Anger is a teacher. It shows us where we are wounded. Mercy let the anger teach her. It told her that she had been foolish to trust. It told her that love was a trap. It told her that the only safe place was inside herself.

The next day she followed Emeka.

She told herself she would not make a scene. She told herself she only wanted to know. She walked behind him at a distance,

keeping to the shade of the trees. Her heart beat fast. Her legs felt heavy. She had never followed anyone before. She had always been the one who led.

He went to the law faculty and then to a small café across the road. Mercy watched from the window of a shop. She saw him meet a woman she had never seen. The woman was bright and confident. She laughed easily and put her hand on Emeka's shoulder as they spoke. The touch was casual, friendly—but to Mercy it felt like a knife.

The woman leaned close and said something that made Emeka smile in a way Mercy had not seen at home. They stood close, talking and laughing. The woman's hand rested on his shoulder again, light and familiar. Mercy's breath came short. She left before they noticed her. The world felt like a stage where everyone else had learned their lines and she had not.

She walked until the sun burned her neck. She wanted to run back and demand answers. She wanted to break something. She wanted to make him feel the shame she had felt.

When Emeka came home that night he was late and smelled of coffee and the city. Mercy did not ask where he had been. She did not want to give him the chance to lie. She sat very still and let the silence grow heavy between them.

Finally she spoke. Her voice was small but it cut the air. "Who is she?" she asked.

Emeka looked at her, surprised. "Who is who?"

"The woman from the café," she said. "The one who put her hand on your shoulder."

Emeka's face changed. For a moment Mercy thought he would tell the truth. For a moment she hoped. But then he sighed and said, "She's a colleague. She needed help with a case."

"A colleague?" Mercy repeated. The word sounded like a blade. "A colleague who touches you like that? Who laughs like you are her whole world?"

Emeka's eyes were tired. "Mercy, you are making this bigger than it is."

She stood up so fast the chair scraped the floor. "You think I am making it bigger?" she said. "You think I am the one who is wrong for wanting to know?"

He reached for her hand. "Please, don't do this. I am tired. I have been working hard."

Mercy pulled her hand away. The touch felt like a lie. She had given him her trust and he had let something else live in the space between them. She had promised to be his wife and he had promised to be hers. Promises are not small things.

"You always say that," she snapped. "You always say you're tired. You always say you're busy. And then you let someone else stand where I should stand."

Emeka's voice rose, not with anger but with hurt. "Mercy, I have never given my heart to anyone else. I have never wanted anyone else. Why do you keep saying these things?"

“Because I have been used!” Mercy shouted. “Because I know what it feels like to be left. Because I know how people smile and then stab you. I will not be made a fool.”

“You are making accusations without proof,” Emeka said, his hands trembling now. “You are hurting me with words that are not true.”

Mercy laughed, a hard sound. “Not true? I saw the messages. I saw you with her. Don’t tell me I am imagining this.”

Emeka stood up. “You followed me? You watched me? Mercy, that is not trust. That is spying. That is not love.”

“Love?” Mercy spat. “You speak of love while you let her touch you. You speak of love while you hide things from me. Don’t you see how that feels? Don’t you see how small I become?”

People in the compound had begun to look toward their house. Voices from other rooms hushed. Mercy felt the heat of shame and pride at the same time. She wanted to make him hurt so he would know how she had hurt. She wanted to break him the way she had been broken.

Emeka’s face went pale. “If you cannot trust me, then what are we doing?” he asked. “If you cannot believe me when I say I love you, then maybe we should stop pretending.”

The words hit Mercy like cold water. She had wanted him to feel pain, but she had not wanted to lose him. The thought of him leaving made her chest ache in a new way. She had not

known how much she needed him until she saw him walk toward the door.

"Don't go," she said, but the plea came out small and raw.

He paused with his hand on the doorknob. "I can't live like this," he said. "I can't be accused every day. I can't be watched. I came to be your partner, not your prisoner."

Mercy moved in front of him, desperate. "You promised," she said. "You promised in church. You promised before God."

Emeka looked at her with a sorrow that cut deeper than anger. "Promises are kept by both people," he said. "You must keep yours too."

She felt something break inside her then—something older than the night, older than the phone. It was the part of her that had wanted to be loved and had not known how to receive it. She had pushed and pulled and now she had pushed him away.

"Fine," she said, voice low. "If you want to go, go."

He left without slamming the door. The house felt empty in a way that made Mercy dizzy. She had wanted to punish him, but the punishment did not make her feel better. It only made the room colder.

Mercy sank to the floor and let the tears come. They were not the loud, angry kind. They were the tired kind—the kind that comes when you realize you have hurt the one person who tried to love you. She had wanted to be safe. She had wanted to be

in control. Instead she had pushed away the one person who had offered her a different way.

The voice that had once whispered mercy came again, softer now. You can choose, it said. You can choose mercy instead of anger.

Mercy did not know how to choose. She had built her life on taking and on being hard. Mercy had to learn that mercy is not weakness. Mercy had to learn that mercy sometimes means staying and listening, sometimes means saying sorry, sometimes means letting go.

She sat in the quiet and thought of the promise she had made in the church. She had said, for better, for worse. She had not known how hard the worse could be. She had not known how her own past would rise up and try to destroy what she had built.

Outside, the sun moved across the sky. Mercy wiped her face and stood. She did not know what to do next. She only knew that the road ahead would be hard. She only knew that anger could not be the only answer.

She walked to the river and watched the water move. It did not stop for anyone. It kept going, carrying leaves and small things along. Mercy thought of the river and of the way life moves even when we are broken. She thought of the voice that said, You can choose mercy.

She did not choose that day. She chose confusion and pain. But the voice waited, patient as ever, and Mercy felt, for the first time, that a different choice might be possible.

Note to the reader: Hurt can make us act in ways we later regret. When anger rises, pause and ask God for wisdom. Mercy's story shows that accusations and quick punishments can destroy what love is trying to build. Choose mercy when you can; it is stronger than revenge.

Short prayer: Lord, when we are hurt, teach us to seek You first before we speak or act.

Scripture to remember: A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger — Proverbs 15:1 KJV.

Episode 5

For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God — James 1:20 KJV

The rain began like a whisper and then turned loud. It hit the roof in hard, steady drums. The street outside Mercy's house filled with water in a few minutes. The sky was a dark bowl and the wind pushed the rain sideways. People ran for cover. Lamps blinked and went out. The town smelled of wet earth and smoke from cooking fires.

Mercy sat on the floor of the small living room, the same place where she and Emeka had once laughed over a cheap movie. The house felt too small for the anger that lived inside her. She had not slept. She had not eaten. Her hands still shook from the fight the night before. She had watched him leave and had felt the house close like a trap.

She heard the key in the door before she saw him. Emeka came in, wet and tired, his hair plastered to his forehead. He carried a small bag and a look that said he had tried to be brave. Mercy stood up without thinking. The old storm rose in her like a tide.

"You left," she said. Her voice was thin and sharp.

Emeka set the bag down and looked at her. "I had to clear my head," he said. "I thought—maybe some space would help."

“Space?” Mercy laughed, but it was not a happy sound. “You left me alone. You left me to think. You left me to imagine things.”

Emeka moved closer. “Mercy, please. I am sorry for how I made you feel. I never meant to hurt you.”

“You never meant to hurt me,” she repeated. The words were a knife. “You never meant to hurt me. That is what everyone says.”

He reached for her hand. “I love you,” he said. “I came back because I love you.”

Mercy pulled away. The touch felt like a lie and a promise at the same time. Her chest burned. She had wanted him to hurt so he would know how she had hurt. She had wanted him to feel the small, hot shame she had carried for years. Now he stood before her, open and tired, and she did not know how to punish him without losing herself.

“You think love fixes everything?” she said. “You think saying ‘I love you’ makes the past go away?”

Emeka’s face went pale. “I am trying,” he said. “I am trying to be the man you need.”

“You don’t know what I need,” Mercy snapped. “You don’t know what I have done to survive. You don’t know the things I have seen.”

He looked at her with a sadness that made her chest ache. “Tell me,” he said. “Let me in. Let me help.”

The words should have been a bridge. Instead they felt like a dare. Mercy had spent her life refusing to be helped. She had learned to take and to fight. She had learned to make people fear her so they would not hurt her first. The idea of letting someone in felt like falling.

Anger rose in her, hot and quick. It was not only about the phone or the woman at the café. It was every small wound stacked on top of each other. It was the hunger and the nights and the times she had been laughed at. It was the memory of the stick that had cut her hand when she stole yams. It was the long list of times she had been small.

She moved toward him and the words came out like stones. "You think you can fix me with words," she said. "You think you can come and go and then come back and I will be the same."

Emeka tried to speak, but Mercy would not let him. Her voice rose. She accused him of things she had not proved. She called him names that cut. She said things that made the room feel colder.

He stood very still and then he spoke, his voice low. "Mercy, stop. You are hurting me."

The words were simple. They were not a defense. They were not a threat. They were a plea.

Something inside Mercy snapped. It was not a thought. It was a movement—fast and blind. She grabbed the nearest thing she could find: a heavy wooden pestle from the kitchen, the kind used to pound yam. It was thick and solid in her hand. For a

moment she did not know why she had it. Then she saw Emeka's face and the world narrowed to the space between them.

She swung.

The sound was not loud. It was a dull, final thing. Emeka staggered and fell against the table. He tried to speak but the words did not come. Mercy stood frozen, the pestle heavy in her hands, rain beating on the roof like a drum.

He lay on the floor and did not move. Mercy's breath came fast and shallow. The house seemed to tilt. She had wanted him to feel pain, to know what it was to be small. She had not wanted this. She had not wanted the silence that followed.

For a long time she could not think. The voice she had heard since childhood came, but it was not the gentle whisper she had sometimes felt. It was a cold, distant thing that said nothing. Mercy dropped the pestle and fell to her knees beside him. She put her hand on his chest and felt nothing. Her fingers trembled.

"Emeka," she said, but the name was only a sound. She pressed her ear to his mouth and listened for breath. There was none.

The rain outside was loud and the house smelled of wet wood and fear. Mercy's mind moved in a strange, slow way. She remembered the promises in the church. She remembered Pastor Chike's words about mercy. She remembered the voice that had called her home. She had heard it many times, but she

had not listened. Now the voice came again, clearer than before. This is not the way, it seemed to say. This is not mercy.

Mercy covered her face with her hands and sobbed. The sobs were not loud. They were small and broken. She had done something that could not be taken back. She had crossed a line she had always told herself she would not cross.

She thought of running. She thought of hiding. She thought of the law and of the faces of people who would point and say, She did this. She thought of Ify and Mama Uche and Pastor Chike. She thought of the town and the way gossip could spread like fire. Her first thought was to fix it. She had always fixed things with quick hands and clever lies. She had always found a way to survive. Now survival felt like a thin, cold thing.

She wrapped Emeka in a blanket and carried him to the back room. Her hands were steady in a way that frightened her. She moved like someone who had done this before, though she had not. She cleaned the floor with water and tried to make the place look like nothing had happened. She moved with a terrible calm. When the rain slowed and the night grew quieter, Mercy sat on the floor and prayed. Her prayer was not the neat bargain she had offered before. It was raw and honest and full of fear.

"God," she said, voice small, "I did not mean—please. Help me. Show me what to do."

The voice she had heard all her life answered not with a command but with a stillness that filled the room. Mercy felt the

Holy Spirit like a presence at the edge of her life, patient and sorrowful. But she did not listen. She had learned to rely on herself. She had learned to hide.

She wrapped Emeka's body and put him on the bed. Then she sat and waited until the first light of morning came through the window. The town woke with the sound of roosters and the smell of bread. People would soon come out into the street and the world would begin to ask questions.

Mercy did not know what she would say. She only knew that the life she had known was over. The road ahead would be full of consequences she could not imagine. She had wanted to punish a hurt. Instead she had destroyed a life and broken her own.

She closed her eyes and let the rain's last drops fall in her memory. The voice waited, patient as ever. Mercy had not listened when it first called. Now she would have to face what she had done.

Note to the reader: Anger left unchecked can lead to terrible things. Mercy's choice in a moment of rage changed everything. If you feel anger rising, step back, breathe, and seek help. Speak to someone you trust or pray for God's peace before you act.

Short prayer: Lord, when anger rises in us, hold our hands and guide our steps away from harm.

Scripture to remember: If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men — Romans 12:18 KJV.

Episode 6

The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the contrite in spirit — Psalm 34:18 KJV

The house smelled of wet wood and old fear. Mercy moved through it like a ghost, doing small things without thinking: folding a shirt, sweeping the floor, setting a cup of tea she did not drink. The morning light found dust on the table and a blanket folded where Emeka had slept. She kept expecting him to come in, to laugh at something small, to ask about her day. He did not come.

For a long time Mercy sat on the floor and stared at the place where he had fallen. Her hands would not stop shaking. She had done something that could not be taken back. The thought of it made her stomach turn. She had wanted to punish a hurt, but she had punished a life.

She tried to pray the way she had prayed before—quick bargains, neat promises. God, help me. I will change. Please. The words felt thin and false. They slid off the place inside her that was raw and heavy. The voice she had heard since childhood came again, but this time it was not a whisper. It was a quiet that filled the room like a presence.

This is not the way, the voice seemed to say. Come to me.

Mercy covered her face with her hands. She had heard that voice many times. Sometimes it had been a comfort. Sometimes it had been a warning. She had learned to ignore it when life demanded hard choices. Now the voice felt like a mirror. It showed her the shape of what she had done.

She thought of Pastor Chike and his calm eyes. She thought of Mama Uche and the way the old woman had kept stories like seeds. She thought of Ify and the way the girl had looked at her with trust. Mercy felt the weight of all those faces like a stone in her chest.

For a while she did what she had always done when the world hurt her—she ran to the places that made the pain smaller for a moment. She went to the bar where the music was loud and the lights were low. She drank until the edges of the night blurred. She let men talk and laugh and forget. She let herself be the center of attention so she would not have to feel the emptiness inside.

But the noise did not drown the memory. It only made it quieter for a little while. When she woke the next morning the guilt was there, heavy and patient. It waited like a shadow.

People began to notice small things. A neighbor asked why Emeka had not been seen. A friend mentioned that he had not come to class. Mercy smiled and said he was busy. She lied with the same calm she had used to survive other nights. Lying had become a tool she used without thinking.

At night she would sit by the window and listen to the town breathe. The voice came again, softer now, like a hand on her shoulder. Confess. Let the truth out. Mercy is not hiding from me.

She did not want to confess. Confession meant loss. Confession meant the law. Confession meant faces that would point and say, She did this. Mercy had always been afraid of being small in the eyes of others. She had built walls so high that even she could not climb them.

Ify came by one afternoon. The girl's face was pale and worried. "Where is Emeka?" she asked. Mercy felt the question like a knife.

"He's away," Mercy said. "He had to go for a while."

Ify sat down and took Mercy's hand. "You look tired," she said. "You look like you have not slept."

Mercy pulled her hand away. She did not want Ify to see the thing inside her that was breaking. She did not want to be the reason Ify would fall. Ify had followed her into nights and parties and had learned to laugh like Mercy. Mercy thought of the scholarship and the dean's letter and the way Ify had trusted her.

"Everything is fine," Mercy lied. The lie felt heavy in her mouth.

Ify left with a hug that Mercy did not return. When the door closed Mercy sank to the floor and let the tears come. They

were not loud. They were small and steady, the kind that come when you realize you have hurt someone you love.

Days passed. Mercy moved through them like a sleepwalker. She went to the market and bought food. She taught a class at the school when Pastor Chike asked her to help with a lesson. She smiled at children who did not know the shape of her guilt. Their faces were bright and honest and they made her want to be better.

At night the voice came again. You cannot hide from truth. Mercy is not a name you can use to shield yourself. Mercy is a gift you must receive and give.

She thought of the name she carried. Her mother had named her Mercy because she wanted a life kinder than the one she had known. Mercy had used the name like armor. She had not let it touch her heart. Now the name felt like a question.

One evening Pastor Chike knocked on her door. He had a quiet look on his face, the kind that made Mercy feel both seen and afraid. “May I come in?” he asked.

She let him. He sat on the low bench and looked at her without hurry. “You have been quiet,” he said. “I wanted to check on you.”

Mercy wanted to lie. She wanted to say she was fine. Instead she found herself telling a small truth: “I am tired.”

He nodded. “We all get tired,” he said. “But sometimes tiredness hides other things.”

Mercy looked at him and felt the urge to run. She had always run from people who saw too much. But Pastor Chike did not press. He only sat and waited.

"Do you pray?" he asked after a while.

Mercy thought of the voice and of the way it had come to her in the night. She thought of the pestle and the way the room had gone quiet. She thought of Emeka's face. Her throat closed.

"I try," she said. "But I don't always hear an answer."

Pastor Chike's eyes were kind. "God speaks in many ways," he said. "Sometimes He speaks in a still small voice. Sometimes He speaks through people. Sometimes He speaks through the law. Mercy, God's mercy is wide, but it does not remove the need for truth."

The words landed like a stone. Mercy felt the room tilt. She had wanted mercy that would let her keep everything. She had wanted a mercy that would not ask for cost. Pastor Chike's words said mercy could be given, but truth must be faced.

That night Mercy could not sleep. She walked to the river and watched the water move. The town was quiet and the stars were sharp. The voice came again, patient and sure. Come home. Confess. Let the truth be known. Mercy waits on the other side of truth.

Mercy stood by the water and felt the cold air on her face. She did not know if she had the courage to step forward. She did not know if she could face the law, the town, the faces of people

she had hurt. She only knew that the voice had not left her. It had followed her into the places she tried to hide.

For the first time since the night with the pestle, Mercy thought of surrender not as defeat but as a door. She thought of mercy as something she might receive if she was willing to be small and honest. The thought frightened her and made her feel strangely light at the same time.

She walked back to the house and sat on the floor. The rain had stopped and the air smelled clean. Mercy closed her eyes and prayed with a voice that trembled. "God," she said, "I am afraid. I don't know what to do. If you are there, show me the way."

The silence answered first. Then, like a soft hand, the voice came: I am with you. Come home.

Mercy did not know what would happen next. She only knew that the silence had been broken and that a choice waited. The road ahead would be hard. It would cost her everything she had built to protect herself. But for the first time she felt the pull of something other than fear.

She stood and walked into the night, not yet ready to confess, but no longer able to pretend the silence would hold forever.

Note to the reader: Hiding from truth only makes guilt heavier. Mercy's silence shows how fear can keep us from the mercy we need. If you are carrying a heavy secret, consider bringing it into the light—truth opens the way for healing.

Short prayer: Lord, give us courage to face the truth and the grace to receive Your mercy.

Scripture to remember: He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy — Proverbs 28:13 KJV.

Episode 7

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also — Matthew 6:21 KJV

The morning light found Mercy with the same heavy feeling in her chest. It was not only guilt. It was a hunger that had nothing to do with food. It was the hunger that had always pushed her to take what she needed and to make people fear her. Now it pushed her to forget.

She tried to keep busy. Pastor Chike asked her to teach a class at the church school, and she went. The children ran to her and called, "Teacher Mercy!" Their voices were bright and honest. For a little while she felt lighter.

After class, Ify stayed behind and watched Mercy fold the chalk into her palm. "You did well today," Ify said, voice small. "The children love you."

Mercy shrugged. "They don't know me," she said. "They only know the lesson."

Ify sat down on the bench. "You look tired," she said. "You haven't been sleeping."

Mercy forced a smile. "I'm fine," she said. "Just a lot on my mind."

Ify reached out and took Mercy's hand. "Come to church tonight," she said. "We need you."

Mercy pulled her hand away before Ify could see the tremble. "I'll think about it," she said. The words were soft, but inside she felt the old pull. Church meant quiet. Quiet meant the voice might come again.

That night Mercy walked past the church and kept going. The bar at the corner had lights and noise and people who did not ask questions. A man at the door called her name like he had been waiting. "Mercy! Come in, come in."

She went in because going in was easier than staying out. Inside, the music was loud and the air smelled of smoke and sweet drinks. A woman named Rita waved at her. "Mercy! Sit with us. You look like you need company."

Mercy sat and let the drink warm her. People leaned in and laughed at her jokes. For a while the hunger quieted. She felt powerful again. She felt seen.

"Ify said you were teaching at the church," Rita said, pouring another drink. "That's good for your image."

Mercy laughed too loud. "Image pays," she said. "And sometimes it keeps people from asking too many questions."

A young man at the table, Tunde, watched her with wide eyes. "How do you do it?" he asked. "How do you make people follow you?"

Mercy looked at him and felt the old thrill. “You give them what they want,” she said. “You make them feel brave.”

Tunde nodded like he had learned a secret. “Teach me,” he said.

Mercy leaned close and whispered, “It’s not hard. Smile at the right time. Say the right thing. Make them think they chose you.”

They laughed and drank and the night swallowed the small, sharp memory of Emeka’s face. For a few hours Mercy could pretend the past was a story someone else told.

But the noise never lasted. When she walked home the street was quiet and the voice came back, patient and sure. You cannot keep taking, it said. You must give back.

She told herself she would stop. She told herself she would help Ify study. She told herself she would go to church tomorrow. The promises were small and easy to break.

A week later Ify came to Mercy’s room with a letter in her hand. Her face was pale. “They suspended my scholarship,” she said. “They say I missed too many classes.”

Mercy felt the floor tilt. “What?” she said. “How?”

Ify sank onto the bed. “I missed lectures. I thought I could catch up. I thought—” Her voice broke. “I thought you would help me.”

Mercy's mouth went dry. She had meant to help. She had meant to be the one Ify could lean on. But nights had taken her. Parties had taken her. Power had taken her.

"I'll fix it," Mercy said too quickly. "I'll talk to the dean. I'll…"

Ify looked at her with a hurt that cut deeper than any insult. "You said you would help me study," she whispered. "You said you would be there."

Mercy had no answer. She had taught Ify how to laugh at fear, not how to face it. She had taught her to run with the crowd. Now Ify was falling and Mercy had been the one who led her there.

That evening Mercy went to the dean's office. She sat in the waiting room and rehearsed what to say. When the dean called Ify in, Mercy stood outside the door and listened. The dean spoke of responsibility and choices. Ify's voice trembled. Mercy felt a cold shame.

Afterward, Ify left town with a small bag and a face that had lost its shine. Mercy watched her go and felt something inside her crack open. The hunger had given her power, but it had also cost a friend.

A few nights later Mercy was at the same bar when a fight started. A man insulted her and she pushed him. He pushed back. The fight grew fast and ugly. Mercy's old skill with her fists came back like muscle memory. She hit and shoved and felt the old rush of power.

When the police came, she slipped away into the rain. She did not want to be caught. She did not want to explain. Running had kept her alive before. Running felt like the only answer.

But running could not hide the truth. The town began to whisper about Emeka's death again. Someone said they had seen Mercy at the bar that night. Someone else said they had heard a loud sound from Mercy's house. The whispers spread like a small fire.

One night Pastor Chike found Mercy sitting on the riverbank, the moon making a silver path on the water. He sat down beside her without a word. For a long time they watched the river move.

"You should not be out here alone," he said finally.

Mercy shrugged. "I needed air."

He turned to her. "Ify left," he said softly. "She told me she could not stay."

Mercy closed her eyes. "I know," she said. The words were small.

Pastor Chike put his hand on her shoulder. "Mercy, you are hurting," he said. "You are trying to fill a hole with noise. It will not work."

She laughed, a short, bitter sound. "What would you have me do? Pray? Sit and wait for the world to fix itself?"

"No," he said. "Come to the table. Sit with us. Let us help you carry the weight."

Mercy looked at him. "Help?" she repeated. "You think I want help? I have survived on my own."

"You do not have to survive alone," Pastor Chike said. "God's mercy is not a reward for the good. It is a gift for the broken. But mercy asks for truth. It asks for change."

Mercy swallowed. The river moved on. "I am afraid," she said. "I don't know how to stop."

Pastor Chike's voice was gentle. "Start small," he said. "Tell one truth. Make one right choice. Let someone stand with you."

That night Mercy prayed with a voice that trembled. She did not promise to be perfect. She only promised to try. The voice she had heard since childhood answered like a hand on her shoulder: Come home. I will show you mercy if you will let me.

Mercy did not know if she could stop the nights or fix Ify's life. She did not know if the town would forgive her. But for the first time in many nights, she felt a small light inside her. It would take more than one prayer to change. It would take courage, confession, and the willingness to be small.

She stood and walked home under the moon, the river's sound following her like a promise.

Note to the reader: Addictions are not always to drink or drugs. They can be to power, attention, or the habit of running

from pain. If you see someone falling, reach out. If you are falling, tell one truth and let one person help you.

Short prayer: Lord, break the chains that hold us. Give us the courage to confess and the strength to change.

Scripture to remember: Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest — Matthew 11:28 KJV.

Episode 8

He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy — Proverbs 28:13 KJV

The market was loud that morning. Women shouted prices. Children ran between stalls. The rain from the other week had left the earth soft and the air smelled of roasted yam and wet wood. Mercy moved through the crowd with her head down, trying to be invisible. She had learned how to disappear when eyes came too close.

A shout cut through the noise. "There! That woman! stop her!" A voice she knew from the compound. It was thin with fear and something like triumph. Mercy's heart slammed against her ribs.

She turned and saw a small knot of people pointing toward her house. Faces she knew were there; neighbors, market women, a man from the bar. Someone had seen her the night Emeka died. Someone had started the story again.

Mercy's legs moved before her mind could catch up. She pushed through the crowd, palms slick, breath short. "I didn't…" she wanted to say. She wanted to tell them everything and then run. But words were heavy and the market was full of ears.

A hand grabbed her shoulder. “Stop!” a voice barked. Mercy twisted and broke free. She ran.

The market became a blur. Stalls, baskets, a child’s shoe left in the dust—everything flew past her. People shouted and tried to block her path. Mercy ducked under a hanging cloth and knocked over a stack of tomatoes. They burst like small red suns on the ground. A woman screamed and pointed. Mercy kept running.

She heard the sound of footsteps behind her—many feet, not just one. The town’s dogs began to bark. Mercy’s breath came in sharp pulls. She ran toward the river, thinking she could lose them in the tall grass by the bank. The river was a long, dark ribbon. If she could reach the trees, she might hide until night.

A hand closed on her arm. It was firm and not cruel. Mercy turned and saw a man in plain clothes with a badge on his belt. He looked older than the others, with tired eyes and a face that had seen too many hard things. He did not shout. He only said, “Mercy Okafor, you are under arrest.”

Mercy’s mouth opened. “What? No—” She wrenched her arm free and pushed past him. The man did not move fast, but he did not need to. He called into a small radio clipped to his shirt. “Nwankwo here. Suspect is fleeing toward the river. Block the south path.”

Mercy ran harder. Her feet slipped in the mud. She heard the man’s voice behind her, calm and steady. “Stop, Mercy. Don’t make this worse.”

She did not stop. She could not stop. Running had been her answer for so long. She ran through a narrow path between two houses and burst into the open field behind the school. The grass was high and wet. Her shoes sank. She could hear the shouts closer now.

A figure stepped out from behind a tree. It was Ify. Her face was pale and her eyes were wide. "Mercy!" she cried. "Please, Mercy, don't run."

Mercy skidded to a halt. For a second she thought of turning and hugging Ify and telling her everything. But the old fear rose like a wall. "Get out of my way," Mercy said, voice sharp.

Ify did not move. "You have to stop," she said. "You have to tell them. You can't keep running."

Mercy's chest felt like it would burst. She looked at Ify and saw the hurt in the girl's face—the same hurt Mercy had caused before. The world narrowed to two choices: run and maybe never stop, or stop and face the thing she had hidden.

Footsteps crashed through the grass. Detective Nwankwo came into view, not alone now. Two uniformed officers flanked him. He did not shout. He walked with a steady step and his eyes were fixed on Mercy.

"Mercy," he said, and his voice had a softness that surprised her. "You need to come with us."

She laughed, a short, broken sound. "You think I'll just go with you?" she said. "You think I'll let you take me?"

Detective Nwankwo's face did not change. "I'm not here to hurt you," he said. "I'm here because someone died. People want answers. You can give them answers, or you can make it worse."

Mercy's hands trembled. She looked at the river and then at the faces around her—the market women, the children, Ify, the detective. The voice she had heard since childhood pressed at the back of her mind. Confess. Come home.

She thought of Emeka's face on the floor. She thought of the pestle heavy in her hands. She thought of the way she had wrapped him and tried to make the room look normal. She had run so long that the idea of stopping felt like falling into a deep sleep.

"Please," Ify said, stepping forward. "Mercy, don't make it worse. I can help you. We can tell the truth together."

Mercy looked at Ify and saw the small, brave woman she had once led. Ify's voice trembled but she stood firm. Mercy's throat closed. The world seemed to tilt.

Detective Nwankwo moved closer, but he kept his hands where they could be seen. "You have a right to a lawyer," he said. "You have a right to speak. But running will only make people angrier. It will make the story worse."

Mercy's knees gave. She sank to the wet ground and put her face in her hands. The grass soaked her palms. She felt small and raw. The chase had been loud and fast, but the end was quiet.

She looked up at the detective. "I didn't mean…" she began, but the words broke.

"You didn't mean to kill him?" Detective Nwankwo asked, voice gentle.

Mercy's eyes filled. "I didn't mean to," she whispered. "I only wanted him to feel small. I only wanted him to know what it felt like. I didn't mean…"

Detective Nwankwo nodded slowly. "We will sort the rest," he said. "But you must come with us."

Mercy let them take her hands. The metal of the handcuffs was cold and real. It clicked and the sound was final. People around them murmured. Some looked away. Some watched with hungry eyes. Ify stood close and did not move.

As they walked back through the market, Mercy felt the weight of every look. The tomatoes she had knocked over lay in a red puddle. A child pointed and laughed. Mercy's face burned with shame.

At the police station, the room smelled of bleach and old paper. Detective Nwankwo sat across from her. He did not shout. He poured two cups of tea and pushed one toward her.

"Drink," he said. "You need to steady yourself."

Mercy took the cup with shaking hands. The tea was hot and bitter. She sipped and felt the warmth move down her throat. For the first time since the night with the pestle, she felt the truth settle in her like a stone.

“Why did you run?” Detective Nwankwo asked.

Mercy looked at him. “Because I was afraid,” she said simply. “Because I thought if I ran, I could hide. Because I thought I could fix it myself.”

He nodded. “You can’t fix everything alone,” he said. “But you can start by telling the truth.”

Mercy closed her eyes. The voice she had heard all her life came again, not as a whisper but as a steady hand. Confess. Come home.

She opened her mouth and began to speak. The words were small at first, then they grew. She told him about the fight, about the message on the phone, about the way anger had taken her. She told him about the pestle and the fall and the way she had wrapped Emeka and tried to hide him.

Detective Nwankwo listened without interruption. When she finished, he sat back and folded his hands. “You have done something terrible,” he said. “There will be consequences. But you have also told the truth. That matters.”

Mercy felt a strange relief and a new fear at the same time. The road ahead would be long. The law would take its course. People would judge. But the chase was over. The running had stopped.

Outside, the market went on. Life moved in its small, stubborn way. Mercy sat in the small room and felt the first small thing like a light: the truth had been spoken. It would not erase what

she had done. It would not bring Emeka back. But it was the first step toward something she had never allowed herself to try mercy.

Note to the reader: Running from truth only makes the burden heavier. Mercy's arrest shows that facing consequences is painful but necessary. When we are tempted to run, remember that confession opens the door to healing.

Short prayer: Lord, give us the courage to stop running and the strength to speak the truth.

Scripture to remember: Therefore if the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed — John 8:36 KJV.

Episode 9

Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee — Psalm 55:22 KJV

The cell door opened with a long, tired creak. Mercy looked up from the thin mattress where she had been staring at the ceiling. Her heart beat fast. She had learned to expect the worst: a guard with a list, a lawyer with questions, a face that would point and whisper. She did not expect a woman with a soft smile and a small bag.

"Hello, Mercy," the woman said as she stepped inside. Her voice was calm. Her eyes were steady. Mercy did not know her name at first.

"You're from the church?" Mercy asked, voice rough.

The woman sat on the edge of the bed and put the bag down. "Yes," she said. "My name is Grace. Pastor Chike sent me."

Mercy let out a short laugh that had no joy. "Pastor Chike sends a lot of people," she said. "They come with words."

Grace did not look offended. She only reached into the bag and pulled out a small loaf of bread and two cups of tea. "Words are not all I bring," she said. "I bring food, and I bring time."

Mercy watched her. The tea smelled of ginger and something warm. For a moment Mercy thought of the nights she had spent running and the way food had sometimes been the only comfort. She took the cup with shaking hands.

"Why are you here?" Mercy asked after a long sip.

Grace folded her hands. "Because you are hurting," she said simply. "Because Pastor Chike believes no one is beyond God's reach. Because I once sat where you sit."

Mercy's eyes narrowed. "You did?" she asked.

Grace nodded. "I made mistakes," she said. "I hurt people. I ran. I thought I could fix things alone. Someone showed me mercy when I did not deserve it. I want to do the same for you."

Mercy wanted to scoff. She wanted to say she did not need pity. Instead she felt something like a crack open inside her. "I killed him," she said. The words were small and heavy. "I didn't mean to. I didn't mean…"

"I know," Grace said. "You told the detective. You told the truth. That was hard. I am not here to tell you it will be easy. I am here to sit with you while it is hard."

They sat in silence for a while. The cell hummed with the sound of distant voices and the drip of water. Mercy watched Grace's hands as she folded the bread into small pieces and handed one to Mercy.

"Tell me about Emeka," Grace said gently.

Mercy looked at her as if she had been asked to climb a cliff. “He was kind,” she said finally. “He tried to be good to me. I pushed him away. I was angry. I hit him. I didn’t mean for him to die.”

Grace listened without interruption. When Mercy finished, she did not offer a quick answer. She only said, “I am sorry for your pain. I am sorry for his family’s pain. I am sorry for the way your life has been broken.”

Mercy’s breath hitched. “Why would you be sorry for me?” she asked. “I did this.”

Grace’s eyes were steady. “Because you are a person,” she said. “Because God loves you. Because mercy is not only for the good. It is for the broken.”

Before Mercy could answer, a shout came from the corridor. Two women in the next cell were arguing loudly. One of them, a tall woman with a scar across her cheek, banged on the bars and called Mercy a name. “You think you’re special?” she shouted. “You think you can get pity?”

Mercy’s hands tightened. The old fear rose like a wave. She stood up, ready to answer, ready to fight. The tall woman’s voice was a match to the anger that lived in Mercy’s chest.

Grace put a hand on Mercy’s arm. “Stay,” she said softly. “Don’t feed the fire.”

Mercy’s first instinct was to lash out. She had always used her hands to protect herself. She had always answered anger with

anger. But Grace's touch was steady. Mercy felt the heat in her palms cool a little.

The tall woman kept shouting. "You killed a man! You don't deserve mercy!"

Mercy's face burned. She wanted to run at the bars and shout back. She wanted to make the woman feel small. Instead she took a breath that felt like a long rope and let it out slowly.

"You don't know me," Mercy said, voice low. "You don't know what happened."

The tall woman laughed. "I know enough," she said. "You think you can cry and get away with it."

Grace stood and walked to the bars. She did not shout. She only spoke in a voice that cut through the noise. "Sister," she said to the tall woman, "we are all broken. We all need mercy. We are not here to judge each other. We are here to hold each other up."

The tall woman's face changed for a moment. The anger did not leave, but something like surprise flickered. "You don't know her," she said.

Grace looked at Mercy and then back at the woman. "I know what it is to be lost," she said. "I know what it is to be afraid. Mercy is not a name she chose to hide behind. She is a person who needs help."

The corridor grew quieter. The tall woman muttered and turned away. The other inmates watched with a new kind of attention.

Mercy felt a strange warmth spread through her chest. She had expected the world to close in. Instead, for a moment, it opened.

After the shouting died down, Grace sat back on the bed. "You will face the court," she said. "You will face consequences. But you do not have to face them alone."

Mercy looked at her. "What can you do?" she asked. "What can anyone do for what I did?"

Grace smiled, small and sure. "We can pray," she said. "We can listen. We can help you say the things you need to say. We can stand with you when the world turns its back."

Mercy thought of Ify and Mama Uche and the children she had taught. She thought of the river and the way it kept moving. She thought of the voice that had followed her since childhood. For the first time in a long time, she felt less alone.

"Will you come again?" she asked.

Grace nodded. "I will come," she said. "And I will bring others. Mercy, the road is hard. But mercy is not a one-time thing. It is a way of walking."

That night, after Grace left, Mercy lay on the thin mattress and thought about the shouting woman and the way Grace had spoken. She had expected anger and judgment. She had not expected someone to stand between her and the noise.

She prayed with a voice that trembled. “God,” she said, “I don’t know how to be small. I don’t know how to ask for help. If you are there, show me the way.”

The silence answered first. Then, like a soft hand, the voice came: I am with you. Come home.

Mercy closed her eyes and let the words rest on her like a blanket. The road ahead would be long and full of hard things. But for the first time since the night with the pestle, she felt a small, steady thing inside her: the beginning of a hope that mercy might be possible, even for her.

Note to the reader: Mercy met anger and judgment, but she also met a hand that would not let her fall. When you are judged, remember that someone may still stand with you. Mercy begins when we choose to listen and to let others help.

Short prayer: Lord, give us the courage to accept help and the grace to offer it to others.

Scripture to remember: Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ — Galatians 6:2 KJV.

Episode 10

Judge not, that ye be not judged — Matthew 7:1 KJV

The courthouse smelled of dust and old paper. People filled the benches like a small sea of faces—some hard, some curious, some with eyes that would not look away. Mercy sat at the defendant's table with her hands folded. Her lawyer whispered things she barely heard. Her heart beat like a drum in her throat.

Pastor Chike and Grace sat together in the front row. Grace's hand found Pastor Chike's and squeezed it. Mercy saw them and felt a small steadiness. Detective Nwankwo stood near the door, his face calm but tired. Emeka's mother sat with a shawl over her head, her face a map of grief. The judge took his seat and the room quieted.

"Court is now in session," the bailiff said. The gavel came down and the sound echoed like a small thunder.

The prosecutor stood and spoke with a voice that wanted to be fair but was edged with anger. "This court will hear the case of the People versus Mercy Okafor. The charge is murder. We will show that the defendant acted with intent and that her actions caused the death of Emeka Okoye."

Mercy's stomach turned. She had told the truth at the station. She had confessed. Now the law would do its work. She had hoped honesty would make things easier. It did not.

The prosecutor called witnesses. A neighbor came forward and told how they had heard a loud sound the night Emeka died. A shopkeeper said he had seen Mercy at the bar that same night. Each voice was a small hammer. Mercy felt each blow.

Then the prosecutor called Ify.

Mercy's breath stopped. Ify had left town. Mercy had not expected to see her face in this room. Ify walked slowly to the stand. Her hair was pulled back. Her eyes were red but dry. She sat and looked at Mercy for a long moment before she spoke.

"State your name," the prosecutor said.

"Ifeoma Eze," Ify answered.

"Ms. Eze, where were you the night Emeka died?"

Ify swallowed. "I was not in town," she said. "I had left to try to find work. I came back when I heard the news."

The prosecutor's questions were sharp. He asked about Mercy's influence, about the parties, about the nights Ify had missed class. Ify answered with a voice that trembled.

"Did Mercy ever tell you about what happened that night?" the prosecutor asked.

Ify looked at Mercy. Mercy's eyes were wet. Ify's voice broke. "She told me some things," she said. "She told me she was

angry. She told me she had hit him. She said she did not mean to kill him."

A murmur ran through the courtroom. Mercy felt the air leave her. Ify's words were small and true and they cut like a blade.

"Did you help her hide anything?" the prosecutor asked.

Ify's face went pale. She looked down at her hands. "No," she said. "I left before that. I was scared. I thought if I stayed I would be dragged down. I am sorry."

The judge leaned forward. "Ms. Eze," he said, "this court expects truth."

Ify nodded. "I am telling the truth," she said. "I am sorry for what I did and for what I did not do."

Mercy wanted to stand and run to her. She wanted to shake her and say, You were my friend. Instead she sat very still and let the words fall. Ify had been a mirror. Mercy had taught her to laugh at fear. Mercy had led her into nights that cost her a scholarship and a future. Ify's testimony was a wound and a truth.

The defense called witnesses too. Pastor Chike spoke of Mercy's good deeds before the night—how she had taught children, how she had helped at the church. He did not excuse what happened. He only asked the court to see Mercy as a person, not only as a crime.

Grace stood and told the judge about Mercy's confession and her willingness to tell the truth. "She has shown remorse," Grace said. "She has begun to seek the path of repair."

Emeka's mother rose to speak. Her voice was small and steady. "My son is gone," she said. "No words can bring him back. I want justice. I want the law to do its work. But I also pray for mercy for all of us."

The courtroom held its breath. Mercy felt the weight of every face. Some looked at her with hatred. Some with pity. Some with a strange, hard compassion.

When it was Mercy's turn to speak, the room seemed to tilt. Her lawyer stood and asked if she would like to say anything. Mercy rose slowly. Her legs felt like they might not hold her.

She walked to the stand and looked at the judge. Her voice was small but clear. "Your honor," she said, "I am sorry. I am sorry to Emeka's family. I am sorry to the town. I am sorry to Ify. I am sorry to myself."

She told the court what had happened—the message on the phone, the anger that rose, the pestle in her hand. She did not try to hide or to soften the truth. She told it plainly, like a wound shown to a doctor.

"I did not mean to kill him," she said. "I wanted him to feel small. I wanted him to know what it felt like to be hurt. I did not mean for him to die. I am sorry."

The judge listened with a face that had seen many stories. “Ms. Okafor,” he said, “your confession is on record. The court will consider all evidence and the law. This is a serious matter.”

Outside the courtroom, people whispered. Some said Mercy should be punished to the full. Some said she had already been punished by the weight of her guilt. Mercy felt both truths like stones in her chest.

After the trial the judge adjourned and set a date for sentencing. Mercy was led back to the holding area. The world outside moved on—market women bargaining, children playing—but Mercy felt like she was under glass.

Detective Nwankwo came to her with a small paper. “You did the right thing by telling the truth,” he said quietly. “It will not make everything right, but it is the start.”

Mercy nodded. “I know,” she said. “I want to make what I can right.”

Grace stood and took Mercy’s hand. “We will help you,” she said. “We will be there when you need us.”

Ify passed by and did not look at Mercy. Mercy wanted to call her name, to say I am sorry, but the words stuck. Ify had been hurt in ways Mercy had not seen. Mercy had led her into nights that cost her future. Mercy had to live with that.

That night Mercy sat on the narrow bed and prayed with a voice that trembled. She asked God for strength to face the sentence,

for courage to make amends where she could, and for the grace to accept the consequences of her actions.

The road ahead was not only about prison or freedom. It was about the slow work of repair—apologies, restitution where possible, and the hard work of changing the habits that had led her here. Mercy had begun to speak the truth. Now she would have to live it.

Note to the reader: Truth and justice can be painful. Confession opens the door to mercy, but it does not remove the need for consequences. When we hurt others, we must be willing to face the cost and to work for repair.

Short prayer: Lord, give us courage to face justice and the strength to do the hard work of making things right.

Scripture to remember: Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people — Proverbs 14:34 KJV.

Episode 11

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest — Matthew 11:28 KJV

The visiting room smelled of soap and old wood. A long table sat between two rows of plastic chairs. Mercy's hands were folded so tight her knuckles were white. Her heart felt like a drum. Today was the day she had promised herself she would stop hiding.

Pastor Chike sat on one side, his Bible closed on his lap. Grace sat beside him, her face calm. Across from them, Emeka's mother sat with a shawl over her shoulders. Her eyes were red but steady. Mercy had not expected to see her. The sight of Emeka's mother made the room tilt.

"You came," Mercy said, voice small.

Emeka's mother looked at her for a long moment. "I came," she said. "My son is gone. I came to hear the truth."

Mercy swallowed. Her throat felt dry. "I am sorry," she said. The words were thin but true. "I am so sorry."

Emeka's mother's face did not soften right away. "Sorry does not bring him back," she said. "But I am here to listen."

Pastor Chike leaned forward. “Mercy,” he said gently, “this is a place to speak the truth and to ask for mercy. Speak from your heart.”

Mercy’s hands trembled. She had practiced this moment in the dark a hundred times. She had imagined excuses, defenses, clever words. None of them fit the shape of the room. None of them fit the face of the woman who had lost a son.

She stood up and walked to the table. Her legs felt like they might not hold her. She put both hands on the wood and looked at Emeka’s mother.

“I killed your son,” she said. The words fell like stones. “I did not mean to. I was angry. I was afraid. I hit him and he died. I wrapped him and I hid him. I ran. I lied. I have been running from the truth for a long time.”

Emeka’s mother did not cry. She only watched Mercy with a look that held both grief and a hard, slow kind of listening.

“I am sorry,” Mercy said again. “I am sorry for the pain I caused. I am sorry for the life I took. I am sorry for the lies. I am sorry for Ify and for everyone I led into darkness. I am sorry for myself.”

Grace reached out and put a hand on Mercy’s shoulder. The touch was small and steady. Mercy felt the heat in her chest loosen a little.

Emeka’s mother’s voice was low. “Why did you do it?” she asked.

Mercy closed her eyes. The memory came back like a film—Emeka's phone, the café, the hand on his shoulder, the way her chest had filled with old hurt. "I was jealous," she said. "I was afraid of being left. I wanted him to feel small the way I had felt small. I thought if I hurt him he would know. I was wrong."

A long silence followed. The visiting room hummed with the sound of distant voices and the clock on the wall. Mercy felt every second like a weight.

Then Emeka's mother did something Mercy had not expected. She stood up slowly and walked around the table. For a moment Mercy thought she would strike her. Instead Emeka's mother reached out and touched Mercy's cheek.

"You broke my son's life," she said. Her voice shook. "You broke my heart. But I see you are broken too."

Mercy's knees gave. She sank into the chair and began to cry. The tears were loud and honest. She had held so much inside for so long that the sound of them surprised her.

"I don't deserve this," she said between sobs. "I don't deserve your touch."

Emeka's mother's hand stayed. "None of us deserve mercy," she said. "But God gives it anyway. I do not say this to make it easy. I say it because I have seen what holding only anger does. It eats you."

Pastor Chike folded his hands. "Mercy," he said, "mercy does not mean there will be no consequences. It means there is a

way forward that includes truth, repair, and change. Will you make what you can right?”

Mercy wiped her face and nodded. “Yes,” she said. “I will tell everything. I will help where I can. I will not hide again.”

Grace smiled like a small light. “That is the start,” she said. “Restoration is slow. It is not only about the law. It is about the work you do with your hands and your words.”

A guard opened the door and announced the time was nearly up. Emeka’s mother stood and folded her shawl. She looked at Mercy one last time.

“Do not think my forgiveness is easy,” she said. “It will take time. But I will pray for you. I will pray for my son. And I will watch what you do.”

Mercy bowed her head. “Thank you,” she whispered. The word felt like a small seed.

After the visit, Mercy walked back to her cell with Pastor Chike and Grace. The corridor smelled of bleach and rain. Mercy’s steps were slow. She felt raw and strangely light at the same time.

“Now what?” she asked Pastor Chike as they walked.

“Now you keep telling the truth,” he said. “You write letters to those you hurt. You ask for forgiveness where you can. You make restitution where it is possible. You learn new ways to live. And you let God do the slow work in your heart.”

Mercy thought of Ify and the scholarship, of the children she had taught, of the nights she had used to hide. She thought of the river and the way it kept moving. “I don’t know how,” she said. “I don’t know if I can change.”

“You can,” Grace said. “Change is a series of small choices. Today you chose one. Tomorrow choose another. When you fall, get up and keep walking.”

That night Mercy sat on the narrow bed and wrote. She wrote to Emeka’s mother with hands that shook. She wrote to Ify and told the truth about what she had done and how sorry she was. She wrote to Mama Uche and to the dean and to the children at the church. Each letter was a small act of repair.

When she finished, she folded the papers and placed them in a small envelope. The act felt like a prayer. She had no idea how the letters would be received. She only knew she had taken the next step.

Before sleep took her, Mercy prayed with a voice that was both broken and hopeful. “God,” she said, “I have done terrible things. I am sorry. Help me to make what I can right. Help me to be small and honest. Help me to let mercy change me.”

The silence answered like a hand on her shoulder. I am with you, the voice seemed to say. Keep coming home.

Mercy closed her eyes and let the words rest. The road ahead would be long and costly. There would be days of shame and nights of regret. There would also be small moments of grace—

an answered letter, a kind word, a child's smile. She would walk the road one step at a time.

Note to the reader: True mercy begins when we stop hiding and start repairing. Saying sorry is only the start; real change comes from steady, honest actions. If you have hurt someone, begin with truth and small acts of repair.

Short prayer: Lord, give us the courage to confess, the strength to repair, and the patience to walk the long road of change.

Scripture to remember: Therefore confess your sins one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed — James 5:16 KJV.

Episode 12

Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ — Galatians 6:2 KJV

The morning the sentence came, Mercy felt the world tilt and then settle into a new shape. The judge's words were clear and heavy. Mercy listened as if she were outside her own body. When the gavel fell, it sounded like the closing of a door she could not open again.

"You will serve time," the judge said. "You will make restitution where possible. You will also take part in community service and counselling." The words were not mercy without cost. They were mercy that asked for payment.

Mercy walked out of the courtroom with Pastor Chike and Grace beside her. People watched. Some spat words. Some whispered prayers. Mercy kept her head down. The cost had been set. Now she had to pay it.

Back in the cell, Mercy opened the envelope she had written weeks before. Her hands shook as she read the words she had sent to Emeka's mother, to Ify, to Mama Uche, to the dean. She had written truth. She had asked for forgiveness. She had offered what she could.

A guard came with a small stack of envelopes. “These came for you,” he said. Mercy’s heart jumped. She opened the first one with fingers that would not stop trembling.

Emeka’s mother had written back. Her letter was short and steady. I read your words. I am not ready to forgive, but I will watch what you do. Show me with your life. The paper felt like both a wound and a map.

Ify’s letter was different. It was full of pain and anger. You left me, she wrote. You taught me to run. I lost my chance. I am angry. I do not know if I can ever trust you again. Mercy read the words and let them sink. She had no right to demand quick healing.

Mercy folded the letters and put them in her pocket. The cost was not only time in a cell. It was the slow work of repair—actions that matched words.

The prison assigned Mercy to the kitchen. At first she thought it would be easy—chop, stir, serve. She learned quickly that humility is a hard teacher. The work was hot and loud. Pots clanged. The steam made her eyes sting. She woke before dawn and slept after the last plate was washed.

One morning a young inmate, Kemi, dropped a tray and cursed. Food spilled across the floor. The cook shouted. Kemi froze, ready to run. Mercy stepped forward without thinking.

“Help me,” she said, and together they cleaned the mess. Mercy did not scold. She worked. Kemi looked at her with surprise. “Why are you helping me?” she asked.

“Because we all have to eat,” Mercy said. “And because I can.” Her voice was small. The answer was simple, but it was the first time she had chosen to give instead of take.

Word spread. Mercy’s hands grew steady. She learned to listen to the other women in the kitchen. She learned their names. She learned their stories. In the steam and the heat she found a new kind of power—the power to serve.

Ify came to the prison one afternoon. Mercy had not expected her. The guard led Ify into the visiting room and Mercy’s heart thudded so loud she thought the whole room would hear.

Ify sat across the table and did not speak at first. Her eyes were hard. Mercy’s hands were folded so tight they hurt.

“You came,” Mercy said, voice small.

Ify looked at her like she was a stranger. “I came to see if you would say sorry,” she said. “Not a letter. Not a paper. I wanted to hear it.”

Mercy swallowed. “I am sorry,” she said. The words were simple and true. “I am sorry I led you into nights. I am sorry I let you miss class. I am sorry I used you.”

Ify’s face did not soften. “Sorry is a word,” she said. “What will you do so I don’t lose more?”

Mercy had no quick answer. She had only the slow plan she had begun to make: help with Ify’s fees if possible, write to the scholarship board, find people who could mentor her. “I will

try," Mercy said. "I will not promise to fix everything. But I will work to make it right."

Ify watched her for a long time. Then she nodded once, small and careful. "I will watch," she said. "Actions, not words."

Mercy met with the prison counsellor and Pastor Chike to make a plan. She wrote letters to the dean and to the scholarship board, asking for mercy for Ify and offering to help with any work Ify could do to make up for lost time. She wrote to Mama Uche and offered to help the old woman's market stall when she was released.

Each act was small. Each act cost her pride. She learned to sit with shame and still move forward. She learned that repair is not a single grand gesture but a thousand small, steady steps.

One afternoon she walked to the chapel with a stack of letters. Grace met her at the door and took them to post. "You are doing the hard work," Grace said. "Keep going."

Mercy nodded. "It hurts," she said. "But it feels right."

One night a spark from a faulty wire started a small fire in the laundry room. Smoke filled the corridor fast. Shouts rose. The alarm clanged. Women scrambled. Panic can make people freeze or run. Mercy ran.

She pushed through the smoke and found a young woman trapped under a fallen shelf. The flames licked the ceiling. Mercy grabbed the woman's arm and pulled. The shelf was

heavy. Her hands burned. She felt the heat like a hand on her face.

"Hold on!" she shouted. "I've got you!"

Two guards came with a hose. Together they dragged the woman out. Mercy coughed and tasted smoke. Her shirt was singed. Her hands were blistered. The young woman clung to her and sobbed.

Later, in the infirmary, the nurse wrapped Mercy's hands. "You could have been hurt worse," the nurse said.

Mercy looked at her blistered palms and then at the woman she had pulled free. "I would do it again," she said. The words surprised her. They were not about proving anything. They were about a new truth: she could risk for others now.

News of the rescue spread through the prison. Some women looked at Mercy with new respect. Emeka's mother read about it in a short note Grace brought. She wrote back: I see you trying. Keep going.

Note to the reader: Real change costs us something. It asks for time, humility, and steady action. Mercy's path shows that repair is slow and often painful, but it is the only way to rebuild trust.

Short prayer: Lord, give us strength to pay the cost of our wrongs and the courage to repair what we have broken.

Scripture to remember: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you — Ephesians 4:32 KJV.

Episode 13

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not — Galatians 6:9 KJV

The days in prison moved slowly. They had a rhythm now: wake, work, meals, prayer time, letters, sleep. Mercy learned to count time by small things—the sound of the bell for breakfast, the way the sun hit the yard at noon, the hush of the chapel at evening.

She did not feel healed. Healing was not a sudden thing. It was a slow work, like a seed pushing through hard ground. Some days she felt the seed stir. Other days she felt nothing but the weight of the soil.

One morning Mercy stood at the sink in the kitchen, scrubbing a pot until her hands ached. Kemi, the young woman whose tray she had helped after the spill, came in with a stack of plates.

"Kemi," Mercy said, "you did well yesterday. You kept your head."

Kemi smiled, shy and proud. "You taught me how to breathe when things go wrong," she said. "You told me to count to three."

Mercy laughed softly. “Counting helps,” she said. “And asking for help helps more.”

A guard called for the women to line up. Mercy wiped her hands and walked out into the yard. The sky was wide and the air smelled of dust and soap. A group of women sat under the shade of a tree, reading a battered Bible. Grace had started a small study group and Mercy had joined when she could.

“Good morning,” Grace said as Mercy sat down. “We are reading about Joseph today—how he kept faith in hard times.”

One of the women, Ada, looked up. “How do you keep faith when you are angry?” she asked. “When the world has taken everything?”

Grace smiled gently. “You keep faith by small acts,” she said. “By telling the truth, by helping one person, by praying when you do not feel like it.”

Mercy listened. The words were simple, but they fit into the cracks of her heart like small stones. She had been trying to do big things—confess, write letters, face the court. Now she saw that the small things mattered too.

After the study, Mercy walked to the mail room. A letter waited for her. Her hands trembled as she opened it. It was from Emeka’s mother.

Dear Mercy, the letter began. I read about the fire and how you helped. I do not know what to say. I am still grieving. But I see you trying. Keep going. — Mama Okoye.

Mercy read the words three times. Her eyes filled. The letter did not fix the past. It did not make the pain go away. But it was a sign that someone was watching her steps.

That afternoon Mercy met with the prison counsellor, Mrs. Eze. They sat in a small room with a window that looked out on the yard.

"You are doing the slow work," Mrs. Eze said. "You are writing letters, you are helping others, and you are coming to the study. That matters."

Mercy nodded. "Some days I feel like I am only pretending," she said. "Like I am acting a part."

Mrs. Eze leaned forward. "Change often feels like acting at first," she said. "You practice new ways until they become real. Keep practicing."

A sharp shout cut through the yard. Mercy and Mrs. Eze ran outside. Two women had started arguing near the laundry. Voices rose fast. One woman shoved the other. The shove sent a basket of wet clothes flying. Water and soap splashed across the ground.

"Stop!" Mercy shouted. The sound surprised her. The two women froze and looked at her.

"Why are you shouting?" the taller woman snapped. "Who are you to tell us what to do?"

Mercy stepped between them. Her heart pounded. The old Mercy would have answered with a slap or a sharp word. The new Mercy took a breath and counted to three.

"Listen," she said, voice steady. "We are all tired. We are all angry. But fighting will not fix what hurts. Sit down. Tell me what happened."

The women glared but then sank onto the bench. Mercy sat with them and let them speak. One had been accused of stealing soap. The other had been blamed for a missing towel. The story spilled out—fear, hunger, small lies. Mercy helped them find a small solution: share the soap, write a note to the guard, apologize where needed.

When the guard came, he saw three women sitting quietly

The weeks folded into months and the small acts began to stack. Mercy learned to measure progress not by grand gestures but by the quiet things: a letter answered, a promise kept, a day without running. Each small success felt fragile and precious, like a glass she handled with care.

Ify's first exam came and Mercy sat in the visiting room with a trembling hope. The girl walked in with a worn notebook and a face that had learned to be careful. They did not speak much at first. Mercy handed Ify a small envelope—money from the craft sales to buy books—and watched the way the girl's hands closed around it.

"I passed," Ify said later, voice low and stunned. "Not top, but I passed."

Mercy felt something loosen inside her chest. It was not relief that erased guilt; it was the quiet proof that repair could move forward. She wrote to the dean, offered to help tutor Ify when she could, and kept showing up for the small, ordinary work of being present.

Setbacks came as they always do. A rumor spread that Mercy had been seen arguing with a vendor; a letter she sent to a neighbor was returned unopened. There were nights when the old hunger rose and she wanted to drown the shame in noise. On those nights she went to the chapel and sat in the back until the words of the hymn settled her like a hand.

One afternoon a woman from the market confronted Mercy in public. Her voice was sharp and the crowd gathered. Mercy felt the old reflex to answer with heat. Instead she breathed, counted to three, and spoke slowly.

"I am sorry," she said, and then she listened. The woman's anger had roots in fear and loss. Mercy did not fix everything with one apology, but she stayed, and the conversation ended without blows. The crowd dispersed. Mercy walked away with a small bruise on her pride and a new lesson in humility.

The craft stall became a place of steady work. Mercy learned to sew, to mend, to fold with care. She taught other women simple stitches and how to sell their wares. The money they earned went to small needs—books for Ify, medicine for Mama Uche, a bus fare for a woman visiting a sick child. The stall was not a

cure for the past, but it was a way to give back, to turn taking into giving.

A letter from Emeka's mother arrived one rainy morning. Her handwriting was careful. I see you trying, she wrote. Keep going. I will watch. The words did not erase the loss, but they were a sign that mercy could be slow and still come. Mercy folded the paper and kept it close like a map.

Counselling and confession became regular parts of Mercy's life. She met with Mrs. Eze and with a volunteer therapist who taught her to name the feelings that had driven her to take and to strike. Naming them made them smaller. Mercy learned to say, "I am afraid," instead of acting on the fear. She learned to ask for help instead of assuming she must survive alone. Community work widened her circle. Mercy helped at the shelter, taught a sewing class for young mothers, and joined a neighborhood cleanup. People watched. Some still crossed the street. Some nodded with cautious approval. Mercy learned to carry both the looks and the work without letting either define her.

One evening, as the sun slid low and the market closed, Mercy sat with Grace and Pastor Chike on the chapel steps. The air smelled of dust and fried plantain. Mercy's hands were callused from work; her heart was still tender.

"I am tired," she said simply.

Grace squeezed her hand. "Tired is part of the road," she said. "Keep choosing the small things."

Pastor Chike looked at Mercy with a steady kindness. “Mercy,” he said, “you are learning to be small in the right way. Smallness that hides is cowardice. Smallness that serves is strength.”

Mercy let the words sink in. She had once used smallness to hide; now she used it to listen. The difference felt like a new muscle in her chest. A quiet victory came when Ify’s scholarship was fully reinstated after she completed the remedial course. The dean wrote that Ify had shown commitment and that Mercy’s letters and the community’s support had helped. Ify hugged Mercy in the visiting room and whispered, “Thank you.” Mercy could not promise to fix every broken thing, but she could keep walking the slow road beside those she had hurt.

The slow work did not end with a single triumph. It continued in the mornings Mercy rose to mend a torn shirt, in the afternoons she sat with a woman who cried, in the nights she wrote honest letters and kept her promises. Each act was a stitch in a life being rewoven.

Note to the reader: Change is not a single moment of repentance; it is a thousand small choices made when no one is watching. Mercy’s path shows that repair asks for patience, humility, and steady courage. The cost is high, but the work of rebuilding is the only way to honor what was lost and to offer hope to what remains.

Short prayer: Lord, give us patience for the slow work of repair and the courage to keep choosing what is right.

Scripture to remember: And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not — Galatians 6:9 KJV.

Episode 14

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake — Psalm 23:3 KJV

The day the parole board called Mercy's name, the chapel bell had just finished its slow, hollow toll. The yard smelled of dust and fried plantain. Women folded their hands and watched as Mercy walked toward the small building where decisions were made. Her steps were steady but her heart felt like a drum in her throat.

Inside, three faces looked up when she entered: a stern magistrate, a woman from the parole board with kind eyes, and a man who wrote notes without looking up. Pastor Chike and Grace sat in the back. Emeka's mother was not there; she had said she would come when she could watch without being overwhelmed.

"Mercy Okafor," the magistrate said, voice flat. "You have applied for parole. Tell the board why you should be considered."

Mercy swallowed. The room felt small. She had practiced this speech in the dark a hundred times, but practice is not the same as truth. She looked at Pastor Chike and then at Grace. Their faces were calm, steady anchors.

“Your honor,” Mercy began, voice low, “I have told the truth about what I did. I have worked in the kitchen and helped others. I have written letters to those I hurt and I have tried to make amends where I could. I know I cannot undo what happened. I only ask for a chance to continue the work of repair outside, where I can help Ify finish her course and support Mama Uche’s stall. I want to be useful, not a burden.”

The woman on the board leaned forward. “You have recommendations,” she said. “Pastor Chike, Grace, Detective Nwankwo, are you willing to speak on her behalf?”

Pastor Chike stood. “Yes,” he said. “Mercy has changed in ways I can see. She is not the same woman who came through our doors. She has done the slow work.”

Detective Nwankwo nodded. “She told the truth,” he said. “She helped in the fire. She has shown remorse. The law will decide the length of her sentence, but I believe she has earned consideration.”

The magistrate’s pen scratched. “We will take this under advisement,” he said. “You will be notified.”

Outside, the yard felt louder than before. Women crowded around Mercy, some with smiles, some with guarded looks. Kemi hugged her and whispered, “You did good.” Mercy felt the warmth of small hands and small thanks.

As Mercy walked back to the cell block, a shout split the air. “Fire! The east wing—smoke!” The alarm screamed. People ran.

Mercy's training in the kitchen and the memory of the last fire moved through her like muscle memory.

"Help the old ones!" a guard shouted. Mercy did not think. She ran.

The east wing was a tangle of smoke and panicked voices. An elderly woman had fallen near the door and could not rise. Flames licked the ceiling. Mercy grabbed a wet blanket from a nearby bucket and wrapped it around the woman's shoulders. The smoke stung her eyes. She coughed and felt the heat on her face.

"Hold on!" she shouted to a young inmate trying to lift a heavy crate. Together they heaved the crate aside and dragged the woman toward the exit. A beam cracked and fell behind them. Mercy felt the world narrow to the woman's weight and the sound of her own breath.

Outside, the air hit them like a blessing. The woman coughed and opened her eyes. Mercy sank to her knees and laughed, a sound that was half sob. The guards and nurses swarmed. Someone pressed a cool cloth to Mercy's face.

Later, as the smoke cleared and the yard settled, the parole board members who had been watching from the office came out. The woman with kind eyes found Mercy and took her hand.

"You acted without thinking of yourself," she said. "That matters."

Mercy's chest felt full. "I couldn't stand by," she said. "I've seen what running does. I won't run from people who need help."

A week later Mercy received the letter. The parole board had recommended conditional release: supervised, with requirements—community service, counselling, and regular check-ins. It was not freedom without strings, but it was a door.

Pastor Chike read the letter with her in the chapel. "This is a chance," he said. "A hard one, but a chance."

Grace squeezed Mercy's hand. "You earned this," she said. "Keep walking the slow road."

Mercy thought of Ify and the scholarship, of Mama Uche's stall, of the children at the church. She thought of Emeka's mother and the way she had touched Mercy's cheek in the visiting room. The cost had been high. The work would not end at the prison gate.

"I will go," Mercy said. "I will keep doing the work. I will not run."

The day Mercy left the prison, the sky was a clear, hard blue. Detective Nwankwo met her at the gate with a small folder of papers and a look that was almost like a smile.

"You ready?" he asked.

Mercy took a breath. "No," she said honestly. "But I'm not running."

He nodded. "That's enough for now."

Ify waited at the bus stop with a small bag and a face that had learned to be careful. When Mercy stepped down from the van, Ify's eyes filled. She ran and threw her arms around Mercy. "You came," she said, voice breaking.

"I promised," Mercy said. "I'm here."

They walked to Mama Uche's stall together. The old woman's hands trembled as she reached for Mercy's. "You are back," she said. "You have work to do."

Mercy smiled, small and tired. "I do," she said.

Life outside was louder and sharper than Mercy had remembered. People stared. Some crossed the street. Some nodded with a cautious kindness. Mercy learned to carry the looks like weather—notice them, but do not let them decide her day.

She met with the parole officer, attended counselling, and began community service at the church-run shelter. She helped Ify enroll in the remedial course and found a small room above Mama Uche's stall where she could stay while she worked odd jobs and saved.

One afternoon Mercy stood at the market and watched Ify bargain for a book. The girl's hands were steady. Mercy felt a fierce, quiet pride.

"You're doing well," Mercy said.

Ify looked up, surprised. "You helped," she said. "You kept your promise."

Mercy's throat tightened. "I will keep trying," she said.

Not everyone welcomed Mercy's return. At a community meeting about safety, a man stood and spoke with a voice like gravel. "She killed a man," he said. "Why should she be allowed to walk among us?"

Emeka's mother sat in the front row. Mercy's stomach dropped. She expected a shout, a stone. Instead Emeka's mother stood and walked to the microphone.

"My son is gone," she said, voice steady. "I will not pretend that Mercy's return erases that. But I have watched her try. I have seen her risk herself for others. I do not tell you to forgive. I tell you to watch. Let her actions speak."

The man muttered. Some people nodded. The room did not fill with applause, but it did not fill with stones either. Mercy sat very still and felt the weight of both judgment and a fragile mercy.

Note to the reader: Reentry is not a single moment of freedom; it is a long, public test. The world will watch. The work of repair continues outside prison walls. Mercy's return shows that courage is not only in grand acts but in the daily choice to keep showing up.

Short prayer: Lord, give those who return to the world strength to keep walking the hard road and patience from those who watch them.

Scripture to remember: And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works — Hebrews 10:24 KJV.

Episode 15

Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven — Malachi 3:10 KJV

The market was louder than Mercy remembered—voices, haggling, the slap of palm on produce. She moved through the stalls with a small basket, her steps careful. People glanced at her, some with curiosity, some with the old hard look. Mercy had learned to carry both without letting either shape her day.

She had a list: buy fabric for the stall, collect Ify's exam notes from the tutor, stop by Mama Uche's for a cup of tea. The list was ordinary, but ordinary felt like a victory.

A shout cut through the market. "Thief! Stop him!" A boy sprinted past, clutching a woman's purse. The crowd split like water. Mercy's heart jumped. The old reflex—run, hide, survive—rose like a tide. For a second she felt the old hunger to disappear.

Then she saw the woman who had been robbed. It was Ada, the woman from the prison yard who had once asked Mercy how to keep faith when angry. Ada's face was red with shock. Her shawl had fallen and her hands trembled.

"Stop him!" someone yelled. The thief darted between stalls, small and quick. He was young—no older than some of the boys Mercy had taught at the church.

Mercy moved before she thought. She had learned to count to three, to breathe, to choose. She ran after the boy, not to catch him with fists but to cut off his path. She reached a narrow alley where the boy would have to slow. He skidded, nearly fell, and looked up—wide-eyed, terrified.

"Give it back," Mercy said, voice steady.

The boy hesitated. He was breathing hard. Behind him, a man in a cheap suit pushed through the crowd, laughing. "Let him go," the man said. "He's only a kid."

Mercy's eyes narrowed. The man's laugh had the same edge she had once used to charm people into doing what he wanted. Mercy stepped between them.

"You take it easy," she said to the man. "You don't need to make this worse."

The man scoffed. "Mind your business, woman."

"Mind your business?" Mercy repeated. "This is my business. We don't let people steal from our own."

The boy handed the purse back, hands shaking. Ada clutched it to her chest and sobbed. The crowd murmured. The man in the suit pushed past and spat a word Mercy had heard before—dismissal, contempt. Mercy felt the old anger rise, but she breathed and let it pass.

A vendor, an old man with a voice like gravel, stepped forward. “You did right,” he said to Mercy. “You could have let him run.”

Mercy shook her head. “I could have run,” she said. “But running doesn’t help anyone.”

Ada looked at Mercy with wet eyes. “Thank you,” she said. “You saved my things.”

Mercy nodded and felt something small and steady settle in her chest. The test had not been grand—no fire, no chase—but it had been real. She had chosen to stay and to protect, not to punish or to run.

That evening Mercy walked to the shelter where she volunteered. The door opened and a young woman stumbled in, clutching a baby. Her clothes were torn and her eyes wild.

“They said there was a place,” the woman gasped. “They said someone would help.”

Grace met them at the door and led them to a cot. Mercy sat with the woman while Grace made tea. The woman’s hands shook as she fed the baby. Her story spilled out—an abusive partner, a night on the street, a small theft to feed the child. Mercy listened without judgment.

“Do you have anywhere to go?” Mercy asked when the woman’s voice faltered.

The woman shook her head. “No. I have nothing.”

Mercy thought of Ify, of Mama Uche, of the nights she had once used to hide. She thought of the slow work she had chosen. “We will help,” she said. “We will find a place for you. We will get you to the clinic. You are not alone.”

The woman’s face crumpled. “Why would you help me?” she whispered.

Mercy looked at the baby and then at the woman. “Because someone helped me,” she said. “Because I know what it is to be lost.”

Word of Mercy’s return had not settled into peace. At a community meeting about market safety, the man in the cheap suit stood again. He had a way of gathering people to his side with a few sharp words.

“She’s dangerous,” he said, voice loud. “She killed a man. Why should we trust her to work with our children or handle money?”

A hush fell. Mercy felt the old shame like a physical weight. She had expected this. She had not expected the man to press so hard.

Emeka’s mother sat in the front row. Mercy’s throat tightened. She had not asked Emeka’s mother to come to every meeting, but the woman had chosen to watch Mercy’s steps. Today she stood.

“My son is gone,” she said, voice steady. “I will not pretend that Mercy’s return erases that. But I have seen Mercy help a child, pull a woman from the street, and risk herself in the prison fire.

I do not tell you to forgive. I tell you to watch. Let her actions speak."

The man in the suit sneered. "Actions? She could be acting."

Pastor Chike rose. "If you doubt, then give her a task," he said. "Let her prove herself in the open. If she fails, we will hold her accountable. If she succeeds, we will have done the right thing."

The crowd murmured. The man in the suit bristled but could not find a better answer. The council agreed: Mercy would lead a small program for at-risk youth—two months of mentorship, craft lessons, and supervised market work.

Mercy felt fear and a fierce, quiet resolve. This was not a test she could pass alone. It would require trust from others and steady work from her.

The first day of the mentorship program, Mercy stood before a group of boys and girls who had known hunger and hard nights. She felt the old urge to perform, to charm, to make them follow. Instead she spoke plainly.

"I was lost," she said. "I made terrible choices. I hurt people. I am not asking you to forgive me. I am asking you to try with me. We will learn to sew, to sell, to keep our heads when things get hard. We will help each other."

A boy with a scar on his lip raised his hand. "Why should we listen to you?" he asked.

Mercy looked at him and told a short truth about a night she had run and the cost of running. She did not make herself small or big. She made herself honest.

They learned to stitch. They learned to count money. They learned to stand in the market and sell with dignity. Mercy taught them to breathe when anger rose and to ask for help when fear came. She failed sometimes—she snapped at a boy who stole a needle and had to apologize—but she kept showing up.

At the end of the two months the council met again. The man in the suit watched with a face like stone. The children stood and sold their crafts at the market. People bought. The children smiled, proud and steady.

The man in the suit could not find a word sharp enough. He left with a mutter. Emeka's mother stood and clapped, slow and sure. Mercy felt a small, fierce joy that was not about praise but about work done.

That night Mercy walked to the river alone. The water moved like a long, patient thing. She thought of Emeka and of the cost she had paid and the cost she still owed. She thought of Ify, of the children, of the woman with the baby.

A voice she had learned to trust came like a hand on her shoulder. Keep coming home, it said.

Mercy knelt by the water and prayed, not for absolution but for strength. "God," she said, "help me to keep choosing the hard

things. Help me to be small when I must and brave when I must. Help me to keep repairing what I broke."

The river moved on. Mercy rose and walked back to the market where the lights still glowed and the stalls hummed. The test had not ended. It would not end in a single program or a single rescue. It would be a lifetime of choosing to stay, to serve, and to speak the truth.

Note to the reader: Tests come in many forms—small crises, public doubts, the temptation to run. True change is proven not by a single act but by the steady choice to keep showing up, to repair, and to serve.

Short prayer: Lord, give us courage to face tests with honesty and the strength to keep repairing what we have broken.

Scripture to remember: But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only — James 1:22 KJV.

Episode 16

Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another — Romans 12:10 KJV

The town prepared for the harvest festival with a kind of fevered joy. Stalls were painted, drums tuned, and the main square filled with banners that snapped in the dry wind. Festivals had a way of making old wounds show up in bright clothes; they also had a way of offering new faces a chance to be seen differently

Mercy walked into the square with Ify at her side. The market's noise felt different now—less like accusation, more like a chorus. People glanced, some with the old hardness, some with cautious warmth. Mercy kept her head down and her hands busy, helping a boy arrange woven baskets at the craft stall.

"Are you nervous?" Ify asked, voice low.

Mercy looked up and met Ify's eyes. The girl had grown steadier—books under her arm, a small smile that did not hide. "A little," Mercy admitted. "But not the way I used to be. This time I want to be present."

Ify nodded. "We'll be fine," she said. "You taught me how to bargain. I'll teach you how to breathe."

They laughed, small and real, and the sound moved like a small blessing through the stall.

Midday, when the sun was high and the drums began to roll, the man in the cheap suit pushed through the crowd again. He had a new ally—a councilman with a loud voice and a face that liked to be seen. They stopped in front of Mercy's stall and the square quieted a little.

"This is the woman who killed a man," the councilman announced, voice carrying. "Why is she allowed to sell here? Why is she allowed to teach our children?"

A ripple of murmurs ran through the crowd. Mercy felt the old heat rise, but she kept her hands on the basket and breathed.

Emeka's mother stood from the front row of onlookers. She walked slowly to the center of the square and faced the councilman. The crowd hushed.

"My son is dead," she said, voice steady. "I will not pretend that Mercy's return erases that. But I have watched her work. I have seen her pull a woman from the street, help a child, and risk herself in a fire. I do not tell you to forgive. I tell you to watch."

The councilman sneered. "Words are cheap," he said. "We need action."

Pastor Chike stepped forward. "Then give her action," he said. "Let her run a workshop for the youth today. Let the children learn. If she fails, we will hold her accountable. If she succeeds, we will have done the right thing."

The councilman hesitated, then, to the surprise of many, nodded. “Very well,” he said. “One workshop. Supervised. If she fails, she leaves the square.”

A hush fell. Mercy’s heart thudded. This was not a private test. It was public and raw. She looked at Ify, at Emeka’s mother, at Pastor Chike, at Grace. Each face steadied her.

“I will do it,” Mercy said.

Children gathered under a bright canopy. Mercy stood before them with a basket of cloth and a stack of needles. Her hands trembled for a moment, then steadied.

“Today we will make small things,” she said. “We will learn to stitch and to sell. We will learn to keep our heads when things go wrong.”

A boy with a scar on his lip raised his hand. “Why should we listen to you?” he asked.

Mercy looked at him and told a short truth. “Because I have been lost,” she said. “I made terrible choices. I hurt people. I am not asking you to forgive me. I am asking you to try with me.”

She taught them to thread a needle, to fold cloth, to count change. When a child’s fingers fumbled, she did not scold—she guided. When a boy tried to take a needle without asking, she did not shout—she corrected and then apologized when she had been too sharp. The children watched, then copied, then laughed.

Halfway through the workshop a shout rose from the edge of the square. A cart had tipped—two donkeys spooked—and a woman screamed as a child ran into the path. The crowd scattered. Mercy's body moved before thought. She dropped the needle, ran, and grabbed the child's arm, pulling him clear as the cart thundered past. A rope snapped and a sack of yams burst, sending tubers rolling like small moons.

The crowd held its breath. Mercy stood with the child in her arms, breathless, hair stuck to her forehead with sweat. The child's mother clutched him and sobbed. People around them began to clap—first tentatively, then with growing warmth.

The councilman's face changed. He had come to find fault and instead found a woman who had risked herself for a child. The square hummed with a new energy.

After the commotion, the councilman approached Mercy with a face that tried to be stern but failed. "You had luck," he said. "A close call."

Mercy met his eyes. "It wasn't luck," she said. "It was choice. I chose to stay."

Emeka's mother stepped forward and placed a hand on Mercy's shoulder. "I will not pretend this erases my grief," she said. "But I will stand where I see effort. Let her continue."

The councilman looked at the faces around him—vendors, mothers, children, the old man with the gravel voice. The square had shifted. The man's power was not gone, but it had been checked by a community that had seen Mercy act.

He nodded once, curtly, and walked away. The crowd did not cheer loudly. They did not need to. The small acts had spoken.

That evening, as the festival lights blinked and the drums slowed, Mercy sat with Ify and Grace by the stall. Ify's hands were stained with dye from the day's work. Grace poured tea and passed a cup to Mercy.

"You did well," Grace said simply.

Mercy looked at the child she had pulled from the cart, now asleep in his mother's arms. She thought of Emeka and of the cost she had paid. She thought of the slow work that had brought her here.

"I am tired," she said. "But not the old tired. This is a different kind."

Ify leaned her head on Mercy's shoulder. "You kept your promise," she said. "You stayed."

Mercy closed her eyes and let the small peace settle. The festival would end. The councilman would find new words. The town would keep its memory of the night. But Mercy had chosen to stand in the light and to risk for others. That choice would have to be made again and again.

She prayed quietly, not for absolution but for strength. "Lord," she whispered, "help me to keep choosing the hard things. Help me to be small when I must and brave when I must. Help me to keep repairing what I broke."

A soft wind moved through the square and the banners fluttered like a benediction. Mercy felt, for the first time in a long while, that the slow work might be enough—not to erase the past, but to build something that could hold the future.

Note to the reader: Public tests are not about proving perfection; they are about proving persistence. Mercy's day at the festival shows that courage is often quiet and that redemption is built in the open, one honest act at a time.

Short prayer: Lord, give us the courage to stand when we are watched and the humility to keep repairing what we have broken.

Scripture to remember: Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another — Romans 14:19 KJV.

Episode 17

Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful — Luke 6:36 KJV

The road from the market to Mama Uche's compound was a ribbon of dust and sun. Mercy walked it with a small satchel of cloth and a heart that felt both heavy and strangely light. The town watched her in pieces now—some faces softened, some still sharp—but the hardest place to face was the one she had left behind: her own house.

She had not gone back since the night the pestle fell. The thought of the threshold made her palms sweat. The house remembered her—its corners held the echo of laughter and the shadow of the thing she had done. Mercy stopped at the gate and stood there for a long time, listening to the small sounds of the street: a child's shout, a radio playing an old hymn, the clack of a vendor's tray.

A voice called from the doorway. "Mercy?" It was Mama Uche, leaning on the frame, eyes like a map. "You coming in or you going to stand there all day?"

Mercy forced a smile and stepped inside. The house smelled of cassava and sun-warmed cloth. It felt smaller than she

remembered and larger at the same time—full of the things she had left undone.

They sat at the low table. Mama Uche poured tea and watched Mercy with a patience that was not pity. “You look different,” she said finally.

Mercy stirred her tea without tasting it. “I am trying to be different,” she said. “I am trying to make right where I can.”

Mama Uche’s laugh was soft. “Trying is a start,” she said. “But you must do more than try. You must be steady.”

Mercy looked up. “I know,” she said. “I have written letters. I have helped Ify. I have worked in the shelter. I have—” Her voice broke. “I have tried to fix things.”

Mama Uche reached across the table and took Mercy’s hand. “Fixing is not always possible,” she said. “Repairing is. You can repair with your hands and your words. You can show up when it hurts.”

Mercy swallowed. “Will you help me?” she asked, small and honest. “Will you let me work at the stall and help Ify? Will you let me be part of the town again?”

Mama Uche’s eyes softened. “You will have to earn it,” she said. “But yes. We will see if your hands match your words.”

As Mercy rose to leave, a neighbor, Chinedu, came by with a basket of plantain. He had been one of the men who had watched her trial. His face was unreadable.

“Mercy,” he said, setting the basket down. “I heard you were back. I wanted to see for myself.”

Mercy bowed her head. “I am here to work,” she said. “To make what I can right.”

Chinedu looked at her for a long moment. “My sister used to come to your classes,” he said slowly. “She liked the way you taught. I don’t know what to think. But I will watch.”

Mercy nodded. “That is all I ask,” she said.

Chinedu left with a nod. The small exchange felt like a stone dropped into still water—ripples that would take time to reach the shore.

That afternoon Mercy walked to the school where she had once taught. Children spilled into the yard like bright birds. When they saw her, a hush fell and then a thousand small questions rose at once.

“Teacher Mercy!” a dozen voices called.

She knelt and let them come. A small boy, Tobi, tugged at her sleeve. “Are you the same Mercy who told us to be brave?” he asked, eyes wide.

Mercy looked at him and felt the old reflex to charm, to make them laugh and forget. Instead she answered plainly. “I am the same Mercy who made terrible mistakes,” she said. “I am also the Mercy who wants to help you learn to be brave in the right way.”

A girl, Ada—the same Ada whose purse she had helped recover—stepped forward. “Will you teach us again?” she asked.

Mercy’s throat tightened. “Yes,” she said. “If you’ll have me.”

The children cheered in a small, honest way. Mercy felt a warmth she had not expected. Teaching was not a stage for power anymore; it was a place to give what she had learned.

That evening, as Mercy closed the stall, the man in the cheap suit appeared again, this time with two men who looked like they wanted trouble. He blocked the path to Mercy’s house and smiled like a man who had won.

“You keep showing up,” he said. “You think the town will forget?”

Mercy set down her basket and met his eyes. “I am not asking to be forgotten,” she said. “I am asking to be allowed to do the work I promised.”

The man laughed. “Work? You killed a man. Work won’t change that.”

A crowd gathered. Mercy felt the old panic rise, but she did not run. She had learned to breathe and to count and to choose.

“You have a right to speak,” she said, voice steady. “But you do not have the right to make me small. If you have something to say, say it to the council. If you want to test me, give me a task. I will do it.”

The man's smile faltered. He had expected a fight or a flight. He had not expected a quiet, steady refusal to be baited. He spat on the ground and walked away with his men, muttering. The crowd dispersed, some nodding, some still watching.

Ify came up behind Mercy and wrapped an arm around her. "You did well," she whispered.

Mercy let herself breathe. The night felt less like a trap and more like a place where she could stand.

A week later, Mercy received a note: Emeka's sister wanted to speak with her. Mercy's stomach dropped. She had not expected to meet the family beyond the mother. The meeting was set at the small community hall.

Emeka's sister, Nneka, arrived with a face that had the same grief as her mother but a different edge—anger wrapped in a careful politeness. She sat across from Mercy and did not speak for a long time.

"You killed my brother," she said finally. The words were not a question.

Mercy's hands trembled. "I know," she said. "I am sorry. I did not mean for him to die."

Nneka's eyes flashed. "You say you are sorry," she said. "But what does that mean for us? For his child? For the things he would have done?"

Mercy swallowed. She had prepared letters and offers of help, but words felt thin in the face of a life gone. "I cannot bring him

back," she said. "I can only try to help where I can. I will help with the child's schooling. I will work to support them. I will do what the law and the family ask."

Nneka's jaw tightened. "You will be watched," she said. "We will not be fooled by tears."

"I don't want to fool anyone," Mercy said. "I want to be honest. I want to help."

They sat in the silence that follows a storm. Finally Nneka stood. "We will see," she said. "But know this: forgiveness is not a thing you can demand. It is a thing you must earn."

Mercy nodded. "I know," she said. "I will earn it."

On the way home Mercy passed the river and saw a small boy trying to fish with a broken line. His hands were clumsy and his face set with concentration. Mercy sat beside him and showed him how to tie a knot. He looked up at her with a grin when the line held.

"Thank you," he said.

Mercy smiled. "You're welcome," she said. The boy ran off, proud of his catch.

She realized then that the work she had to do was not only to face the big things—the court, the family, the town—but to keep doing the small things that stitch a life back together: teaching a child to tie a knot, helping a neighbor with a stall, showing up when someone needs a hand.

That night Mercy knelt by her bed and prayed with a voice that was both weary and steady. “Lord,” she said, “I cannot fix what is gone. I can only keep choosing to do right. Help me to be patient and to keep my hands busy with good work.”

The silence answered like a steady breath. Mercy lay down and slept, not because the past was gone, but because she had chosen, again, to keep walking the slow road.

Note to the reader: Reckoning at home is often the hardest. It asks us to face the people we hurt most directly and to accept that forgiveness, if it comes, will be slow. Start with small acts of repair and keep showing up.

Short prayer: Lord, give us the courage to face those we have hurt and the patience to earn forgiveness through steady action.

Scripture to remember: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you — Ephesians 4:32 KJV.

Episode 18

Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man — Colossians 4:6 KJV

The morning market smelled of pepper and smoke. Mercy moved through the stalls with a basket of finished crafts, her hands steady. The town had grown used to seeing her there—some faces softened, some still watched with suspicion—but today the air felt different, as if something was about to shift.

Ify met her at the stall, eyes bright. "They called me," she said, breathless. "The dean—my scholarship is extended. I start the next term next week."

Mercy's chest tightened. She wanted to laugh and cry at the same time. "That's good," she said, voice small. "You earned it."

Ify hugged her, hard. "You kept your promise," she whispered. "You showed up."

Mercy let the words settle. Promises had been the scaffolding of her new life—small, steady commitments that held her when the past tried to pull her under.

A woman approached the stall with a small boy clinging to her skirt. Mercy recognized the child from the neighborhood—the

one whose mother had once been helped at the shelter. The boy's eyes were wide and curious.

"Is this your work?" the woman asked, pointing to the woven baskets.

"Yes," Mercy said. "We make them here."

The boy peered at Mercy and then, without warning, reached out and took her hand. His fingers were small and warm. Mercy froze, then let him hold her palm.

"Emeka's child," the woman said quietly. "Nkechi. She wanted to meet you."

Mercy's breath hitched. She had written letters, offered help, promised support—but meeting the child felt like stepping into a room with the lights on. The child looked up at her with a face that had no memory of the night, only the present.

"Hello," Mercy said, voice trembling. "I'm Mercy."

Nkechi smiled and showed Mercy a small toy. "Do you like it?" she asked, as if Mercy were a friend.

Mercy's throat closed. She knelt and took the toy, hands shaking. "I do," she said. "Thank you."

Emeka's sister, Nneka, stood a little way off, watching. Her face was unreadable. Mercy felt the old fear rise—fear of being rejected, fear of causing more harm. She swallowed and kept her hands open.

That evening the community center held a small meeting to discuss a new youth program. Mercy had been asked to speak about the mentorship work. She stood before the room—vendors, mothers, Pastor Chike, Grace, Detective Nwankwo, and, to her surprise, Emeka's mother and Nneka.

Mercy's voice was steady. "I want to say something I should have said a long time ago," she began. "I am sorry. I cannot undo what I did. I can only try to live differently. I promise to care for Nkechi as the family allows. I promise to teach the children here to choose differently. I promise to keep showing up, even when it is hard."

A murmur ran through the room. Emeka's mother's eyes were wet but calm. Nneka's jaw tightened, then relaxed a fraction. Mercy felt the weight of the words leave her chest like a small stone.

Detective Nwankwo stood and nodded. "Promises are only as good as the work behind them," he said. "But I have seen Mercy work. I will support the program and help where I can."

Pastor Chike added, "We will hold her accountable. We will also help her keep her promises."

Grace stepped forward and placed a hand on Mercy's shoulder. "You are not alone," she said. "We will walk with you."

That same night, as Mercy closed the stall, the man in the cheap suit returned with two men who had once jeered at her. They blocked the path and laughed like they had a right to own the street.

“You think you can buy forgiveness with baskets?” the man sneered. “You think the town will forget?”

Mercy felt the old panic rise, but she had learned to breathe. She looked at Ify, at the children who had come to watch, at Emeka’s mother standing a little way off. The choice was clear: fight and prove herself by force, or stand and prove herself by restraint.

“You can say what you like,” Mercy said, voice low. “But I will not be baited. If you have a complaint, take it to the council. If you want to test me, give me a task. I will do it.”

The man spat and stepped closer. One of his companions shoved Mercy’s basket, sending a few woven pieces tumbling. A child cried out. The crowd tensed.

Mercy moved without thinking. She bent, picked up the fallen baskets, and handed them back to the vendor whose stall had been hit. Her hands were steady. She did not shout. She did not strike. The man’s face, used to getting a rise, flushed with something like confusion.

“You’re weak,” he said, trying to reclaim the moment.

“No,” Mercy replied. “I am choosing a different strength.”

Emeka’s mother stepped forward then, her voice clear. “We will not be ruled by fear,” she said. “This town will not be a place where men bully and women run. If you have a complaint, speak it. If you have a problem, solve it. But we will not be cowed.”

The man muttered and left with his men. The crowd dispersed, some nodding, some whispering. Mercy felt the adrenaline drain and a new tiredness settle in—one that came from choosing restraint when the old reflex was to strike.

After the crowd thinned, Nneka approached Mercy. She stopped a few feet away and looked at the child playing near the stall.

"You said you would help with the child," Nneka said. "Words are cheap."

"I know," Mercy said. "I will help. I will work. I will be accountable."

Nneka's face softened a fraction. "We will watch," she said. "But if you fail, we will not be kind."

"I don't expect kindness," Mercy said. "I expect work."

Nneka nodded once and walked away. Emeka's mother lingered and then, quietly, pressed a small envelope into Mercy's hand. Inside was a note: Keep your promises. That is all I ask.

Mercy folded the paper and put it in her pocket. The weight of it felt like both a challenge and a benediction.

Note to the reader: Promises are powerful only when backed by steady action. Mercy's life shows that true repair is public and private—spoken aloud and lived out in small, consistent choices.

Short prayer: Lord, give us the courage to keep our promises and the humility to be held accountable.

Scripture to remember: Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful — Proverbs 27:6 KJV.

Episode 19

Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me — Psalm 51:10 KJV

The town gathered at the small memorial by the river on a humid evening. Lanterns swung from poles and the air smelled of smoke and fried yam. People came with folded faces—some to remember, some to judge, some to watch what Mercy would do next. Emeka's picture stood on a simple wooden easel, a ribbon of white pinned to the frame. Mercy stood at the edge of the crowd, hands folded, the weight of the past like a stone in her chest.

Pastor Chike called the meeting to order. He spoke of grief and of the work of community. He spoke of truth and of the hard road of repair. When he finished he turned and looked at Mercy. "If Mercy wishes to speak," he said, "let her speak."

Mercy's legs felt like they might not hold her. She walked to the front and stood before Emeka's picture. The lantern light made the photograph look like a small window into a life she had broken. Her voice trembled at first, then steadied.

"I have told the truth to the court," she said. "I have written letters. I have tried to make amends. But there are things I

have not said in public—things I have hidden even from myself. Tonight I will say them."

A hush fell. Some people shifted on their feet. Ify stood behind Mercy, hands clenched. Emeka's mother sat with her shawl tight, eyes fixed.

Mercy began with small things—the petty lies, the nights she had used to numb herself, the ways she had taught Ify to laugh at fear. Then she told the story of the message on Emeka's phone, the argument that rose, the pestle that fell. She did not spare herself. She told the ugly details she had once wrapped in silence.

"I did not mean to kill him," she said. "I meant to hurt him the way I had been hurt. I meant to make him small. I did not mean for his life to end. I am sorry. I am sorry to his mother, to his sister, to his child, to Ify, to Mama Uche, to the town, and to myself."

The words hung in the air like a bell. Some faces softened. Some hardened. A child in the crowd began to cry. Mercy felt the truth leave her like a breath.

After she finished, Emeka's mother rose slowly. For a moment Mercy feared the worst. Instead the woman walked to the microphone and spoke with a voice that had learned to hold both grief and clarity.

"You have told the truth," she said. "That does not make the pain go away. But it is a start. I will not pretend I understand

everything. I will not pretend to forgive quickly. But I will watch what you do."

A murmur moved through the crowd. The man in the cheap suit stood at the back, arms folded, face unreadable. He did not shout. He did not need to. The town's judgment was a slow thing, and Mercy had learned to live with its pace.

After the meeting Mercy walked to the river alone. The water moved like a long, patient thing. She sat on the bank and let the night press close. The confession had been heavier than she expected. Saying the truth in public had opened a door she could not close.

A figure came and sat a short way off. It was Detective Nwankwo. He did not speak at first. He only watched the river.

"You did the right thing," he said finally. "Not everyone can stand and tell the whole truth."

Mercy looked at him. "Will it change anything?" she asked.

He shrugged. "It changes you," he said. "And sometimes changing one person changes the world around them, slowly."

They sat in silence. Mercy thought of Emeka's child, of Ify's steady progress, of the small acts that had become her life. The confession had not erased the past, but it had made her life simpler—no more hiding, no more half-truths.

The next morning a rumor spread that the man in the cheap suit had threatened to sue the council for allowing Mercy to run

the youth program. The rumor grew teeth and the council called an emergency meeting. Mercy was summoned to speak again.

She entered the hall with Ify at her side. The councilman's voice was loud and sharp. "This town cannot be divided by sentiment," he said. "We must protect our people."

Emeka's mother rose and spoke before Mercy could. "We will not be ruled by fear," she said. "We will not let one man's bitterness undo the work of many."

The council voted to stand by the mentorship program and to formalize a supervision plan. Mercy felt relief like rain. The decision did not end the hostility, but it gave the program a shield. As the meeting broke up, the man in the cheap suit stepped toward Mercy. He did not shout. He only said, "You have made many promises. I will be watching."

Mercy met his eyes. "So will we," she said. "And we will keep our promises."

Weeks passed and the mentorship program grew. Children learned to stitch and to sell. They learned to count money and to speak without fear. Mercy taught them not only skills but the small discipline of honesty—how to admit a mistake and to make it right.

One afternoon a boy in the program, Chike, was caught stealing from a vendor. The vendor wanted him punished. The councilman wanted a public example. The crowd gathered, hungry for spectacle. Mercy stepped forward. She could have demanded the harshest penalty. Instead she proposed a plan:

Chike would work at the stall, repay what he had taken, and attend extra sessions on responsibility. If he stole again, the law would take its course.

The vendor agreed, grudgingly. The councilman watched, skeptical. Chike's mother wept and thanked Mercy with a voice that trembled. The choice was not popular with everyone, but it was the kind of mercy that asked for accountability. Mercy had learned that mercy without consequence was not mercy at all. She had learned to hold both truth and compassion together.

One evening Emeka's sister, Nneka, came to Mercy's stall. She stood for a long time, watching the children sell their crafts. When she finally spoke her voice was quieter than Mercy expected.

"You have kept your promises," she said. "You have shown up. You have not run."

Mercy's throat tightened. "I cannot bring him back," she said. "I can only keep trying to do right."

Nneka nodded. "Then keep trying," she said. "For his child. For the town. For yourself."

She reached into her bag and handed Mercy a small, folded cloth. "My brother liked this," she said. "I want you to have it. Not as forgiveness, but as a reminder to keep walking the hard road."

Mercy took the cloth with hands that shook. The gift was small and fierce. It felt like a benediction and a challenge.

Months turned into a year. Mercy's life was not free of pain. There were nights when the old hunger rose and the temptation to hide returned. There were days when the man in the cheap suit found new ways to stir trouble. But there were also small victories: Ify's graduation, a letter from Emeka's mother that read, We see you, a child who learned to count and to be honest.

Mercy learned to measure her life not by the absence of accusation but by the presence of steady work. She learned that confession was not a single act but a way of living—an ongoing practice of truth, repair, and service.

One evening she stood by the river and watched the water move. The town's lights reflected like a scatter of small stars. She thought of Emeka and of the life that had been broken and of the life she was trying to rebuild.

A voice she had come to trust whispered, Keep coming home.

Mercy folded the small cloth Nneka had given her and placed it in her pocket. She rose and walked back toward the market where the lights still glowed and the stalls hummed. The road ahead was long and costly, but she had learned to walk it one honest step at a time.

Note to the reader: Public confession is a brave and costly act. It does not erase harm, but it opens the possibility of repair.

True mercy holds truth and accountability together; it asks for consequences and offers a path forward.

Short prayer: Lord, give us the courage to speak the whole truth and the strength to live the slow work of repair.

Scripture to remember: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness — 1 John 1:9 KJV.

Episode 20

In the day of trouble I will call upon thee: for thou wilt answer me — Psalm 86:7 KJV

The harmattan came early that year, a dry wind that stripped color from the trees and made the market dust rise like a pale cloud. People wrapped scarves around their faces and moved with a careful economy. Mercy felt the season in her bones—the way cold made old wounds ache and patience thin.

She rose before dawn to mend a tear in a bundle of cloth. The stall's light was a small island in the gray morning. Ify arrived with a stack of papers—exam results, a letter from the dean, a list of supplies for the new term. The girl's hands trembled with a mixture of fatigue and triumph.

"They accepted my project," Ify said, voice small and bright. "They want me to present next month."

Mercy smiled and felt a warmth that had nothing to do with the sun. "You earned it," she said. "You kept showing up."

Ify's eyes shone. "You kept your promise," she said. "You kept showing up too."

Outside, the market woke. The man in the cheap suit watched from a distance, his coat buttoned against the wind. He still found ways to stir the air, but his voice had less power than it

once did. Mercy had learned to let the town's weather pass over her like a sky—notice it, but not be carried away.

One afternoon a messenger arrived with news that made Mercy's chest tighten: Mama Uche had fallen ill. The old woman's stall was a small kingdom of woven baskets and dried peppers; she had been Mercy's first anchor when Mercy returned. Mercy ran to the compound and found Mama Uche pale and stubborn, refusing to be carried to the clinic.

"You will not die on my floor," Mama Uche said when Mercy tried to lift her. "I will not be a burden."

"You are not a burden," Mercy said, voice steady. "Let me help."

They argued like two old women who had known each other for years. Mercy finally persuaded Mama Uche to go to the clinic. The diagnosis was a fever and a lung infection—treatable, but slow. Mercy sat by the bedside and held the old woman's hand while the nurse adjusted the drip.

At night, when the ward hummed with the sound of other people's pain, Mercy prayed with a voice that trembled. Keep her, Lord. Keep her for the work she still has to do. The prayer was small and selfish and honest.

Mama Uche recovered slowly. Mercy learned to bring warm soups, to run errands, to sit in the quiet and listen to the old woman's stories. The work was not dramatic. It was the slow tending of a life that had once tended hers. Winter made tempers short. A vendor accused Ify of shortchanging him; a rumor spread that Mercy had taken a piece of cloth without

paying. The market's gossip was a small, persistent frost. Mercy answered each accusation with the same tools she had learned: truth, steady work, and the willingness to be corrected when she was wrong. One evening a boy from the mentorship program, Chike, came to Mercy with a face full of shame. He had been caught in a fight and the council wanted to ban him from the program. Mercy sat with him in the dim light of the stall and listened.

"Why did you fight?" she asked.

He looked at the ground. "They called my mother names," he said. "They said she was a thief."

Mercy felt the old anger rise like a tide. She could have marched to the council and demanded justice. Instead she taught Chike to write a letter of apology and a request for mediation. She went with him to the council and spoke for him not as a shield but as a guide.

The council agreed to a mediated meeting. Chike apologized. The other boys apologized. The town watched a small reconciliation happen in public, messy and imperfect. Mercy felt the long winter ease a little. The work of repair was not a single blaze but a series of small fires that warmed one person at a time. One morning a small envelope arrived at the stall. Inside was a photograph of Nkechi, Emeka's child, holding a drawing of a house with a bright sun. On the back, in Nneka's careful hand, a note: She drew this for you. Keep walking. Mercy folded the photograph and held it like a talisman. The child's smile was

a small, fierce thing that made the long winter feel less endless. Mercy pinned the picture above her workbench and let it remind her why she kept showing up.

That week Emeka's mother came to the stall with a small parcel. "We have been talking," she said, voice steady. "Nneka and I. We want to ask if you will help with Nkechi's lessons. Not as a favor, but as part of the promise you made."

Mercy's throat tightened. "I will," she said. "I will come every week."

Emeka's mother nodded. "We will watch," she said. "And we will hold you to your word."

Mercy left the stall that day with a small, fierce joy. The work she had done in public had become private responsibility. The promise had weight, and she welcomed it. Not every day was a small victory. One night Mercy woke with the old panic—images of the pestle, the dark room, the way she had wrapped a life in silence. The long winter pressed in and the temptation to run felt like a warm door.

She rose and walked to the river. The water moved like a patient thing. Detective Nwankwo found her there, as he often did in the quiet hours.

"You look tired," he said without preamble.

"I am tired," Mercy admitted. "Sometimes I think the work will never be enough." He sat beside her. "It will never be enough

to erase what happened," he said. "But it can be enough to change what comes next. That matters."

They sat in silence. Mercy let the truth settle like a stone. The long winter would not end with a single act. It would end with a thousand small choices to keep showing up. Spring came slowly. The harmattan's dry breath eased and the market's colors returned. Ify's presentation at the dean's office was a quiet triumph—her project accepted, her confidence steadier. Chike kept his place in the program and began to teach younger boys how to stitch. Mama Uche returned to her stall with a new scarf and a stubborn smile.

Mercy stood at the stall one morning and watched the town move. The long winter had not been kind, but it had taught her patience. She had learned to hold both grief and hope in the same hand. She folded the photograph of Nkechi and slipped it into her pocket. The child's drawing of a house with a bright sun felt like a promise she had been given and a promise she had to keep.

Note to the reader: Seasons change, but the work of repair is steady. Long winters test our resolve; they teach us patience, humility, and the quiet courage to keep showing up. Small acts—tending the sick, teaching a child, keeping a promise—are the slow thaw that makes new life possible.

Short prayer: Lord, sustain us in the long winters of our lives. Give us patience to endure and courage to keep repairing what we have broken.

Scripture to remember: They that sow in tears shall reap in joy — Psalm 126:5 KJV.

Episode 21

A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones — Proverbs 17:22 KJV

The morning of Nkechi's birthday arrived like a small promise. The market smelled of fresh dough and roasted corn. Mercy woke before dawn, hands already busy with a list she had written in the quiet hours: a small cake from the baker, a borrowed string of paper flags, a bundle of crayons, a wrapped book from Ify's savings. The day felt fragile and holy.

Ify arrived with a paper crown she had cut and decorated. "She'll like this," she said, voice bright and careful. Mercy smiled and felt the old tightness in her chest loosen a little. The work of repair had taught her to celebrate small things—birthdays, passed exams, a healed hand. These were the stitches that held a life together.

They set up a small table by the stall. Mama Uche brought a pot of jollof rice and a bowl of fried plantain. The children from the mentorship program hung the flags and arranged the little chairs. Word had spread quietly: a child's birthday, everyone welcome. People came with small gifts—an orange, a knitted hat, a toy car. Some faces were new to Mercy's life; some were

the same ones that had watched her trial. All of them gathered like a cautious chorus.

When Nkechi arrived, she wore a dress that was too big and a grin that filled the square. She ran to Mercy and threw her arms around her waist. Mercy felt the world tilt and then settle. The child's hug was simple and fierce, a small thing that carried a weight she could not name.

Emeka's mother stood a little apart, hands folded, eyes wet. Nneka hovered near the edge, watchful. Mercy approached them with the cake and a small, steady voice.

"Happy birthday, Nkechi," she said. "May you grow in joy."

Emeka's mother nodded. "Thank you for this," she said, voice steady. "We will watch how you keep your promises."

Mercy bowed her head. "I will," she said. The words were not a plea; they were a vow.

Children crowded the table and the cake was cut into uneven slices that tasted like sugar and hope. Laughter rose—bright, unpracticed. A boy from the program, Chike, led a clumsy game of musical chairs and fell into a pile of giggles. Ify read a short story about a brave little girl who learned to mend a torn kite. Mercy watched the child who had no memory of the night that had changed so many lives, and she felt both joy and a sharp, steady ache.

A vendor who had once muttered at Mercy's presence came with a small wrapped parcel. "For the child," he said, avoiding

Mercy's eyes. Mercy accepted it with a nod. The man lingered, then asked quietly, "How do you keep going?"

Mercy thought of the long winter, the fires, the river, the slow work. "One small thing at a time," she said. "And people who will not let you run."

He nodded as if the answer made sense and walked away. Mercy returned to the circle and helped tie the paper crown on Nkechi's head. The child's laughter was a small bell that seemed to ring through the market.

As the party wound down, the man in the cheap suit appeared at the edge of the crowd. For a moment the air tightened. He had not been seen for weeks; his absence had been a small mercy. Now he stood with a face that tried to be casual.

"You keep making a show of this," he said, voice low. "You think a cake and a few toys will change what you did?"

Mercy looked at him without flinching. The old reflex to answer with heat rose, but she breathed and let it pass. Around them, people watched. Emeka's mother stepped forward and spoke with the same steady voice she had used so often.

"This is a child's day," she said. "If you have a complaint, take it to the council. If you want to hurt people, do it somewhere else."

The man's jaw tightened. He spat a word and left, shoulders hunched. The crowd exhaled as if a storm had passed. Mercy felt the tremor of fear leave her like a held breath. The day had

been small and true; it would not be undone by one man's bitterness.

After the guests left and the flags drooped in the late sun, Mercy sat with Nkechi on her lap and read the small book Ify had bought. The child's head rested against Mercy's chest and the rhythm of her breathing was a steady, human thing.

"You are kind," Nkechi said suddenly, looking up with the blunt honesty of a child.

Mercy's throat tightened. "I try to be," she said. The words were simple and honest.

Nkechi's small hand found Mercy's and squeezed. Mercy felt a warmth that was not the absence of guilt but a new kind of courage—the courage to keep showing up for a life that had no memory of the night that had broken so many others.

Detective Nwankwo came by as the sun dipped low. He watched the child for a moment and then looked at Mercy. "You did good today," he said.

Mercy shook her head. "I didn't do enough," she said. "I never will."

He smiled, small and tired. "Enough is not the point," he said. "The point is that you keep trying. That you keep making the choice to be present."

Mercy folded the small paper crown and tucked it into her pocket. The day had been a small reckoning—joy braided with

sorrow, celebration braided with watchfulness. She had not earned forgiveness; she had earned a chance to keep walking.

That night the market lights blinked and the square emptied. Mercy walked home with Ify, the child's laughter still ringing in her ears. She knelt by her bed and prayed with a voice that was both weary and grateful.

"Lord," she said, "thank you for this small life. Help me to keep my promises to her and to all I have hurt. Give me the strength to keep choosing repair over hiding."

The silence answered like a hand on her shoulder. Mercy folded the small cloth Nneka had given her and placed it beside the crown. The objects were small and ordinary, but they were anchors—reminders of the work she had promised to do.

She slept with the sound of the river in her ears and the memory of a child's smile in her heart. The road ahead would be long and full of hard things, but for the first time in a long while she felt a steadyness that was not the absence of pain but the presence of a new way to live.

Note to the reader: Small celebrations can be acts of repair. They stitch communities together and give the broken a place to begin again. When you have hurt others, show up for the small moments that matter to them.

Short prayer: Lord, help us to honor the small lives in our care and to keep our promises with steady hands.

Scripture to remember: Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God — Mark 10:14 KJV.

Episode 22

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts — Colossians 3:15 KJV

The market felt fuller than usual, as if the town itself had taken a breath and decided to keep it. Stalls brimmed with yams and peppers, children ran with sticky fingers, and the air carried the steady rhythm of bargaining voices. Mercy moved through it all with a basket on her arm and a quiet steadiness that had become part of her shape.

Ify's graduation was that afternoon. The dean had invited a few community members to the small ceremony, and the stall had been closed early so Mercy could walk with Ify to the hall. The walk felt like a small procession—neighbors nodding, a vendor pausing to clap, Mama Uche leaning on her cane with a proud, stubborn smile.

When Ify's name was called, she rose with a face that had learned to hold hope without demanding it. Mercy watched from the front row as the girl accepted her certificate. The applause was modest but sincere. Mercy felt a warmth that was not triumph but the quiet fruit of steady work.

After the ceremony the dean stepped down from the dais and approached Mercy. He did not offer praise for the past; he

offered a practical thing—a small grant from the college's community fund to support the mentorship program. "We saw what you did," he said. "We want to help it grow."

The grant was not a cure for everything, but it was a vote of confidence. People in the crowd murmured approval. The man in the cheap suit watched from the edge, his face unreadable. He did not speak.

Emeka's mother stood and walked to the front. She took Mercy's hand in a gesture that had once seemed impossible. "Keep walking," she said, voice steady. "We will watch, and we will help where we can."

Mercy's throat tightened. The words were not absolution; they were a covenant of accountability and care. She bowed her head and accepted the small, fierce blessing.

That evening, as the sun slid low, a rumor spread that the man in the cheap suit had gathered a few men to challenge the program's legitimacy. Mercy went to the square not to confront but to be present. The crowd gathered—some curious, some protective.

The man stepped forward and spoke with the old sharpness. "This program is a show," he said. "It hides the truth."

Before Mercy could answer, a vendor she had helped months ago stepped into the light. He spoke plainly about the children who now earned honest money, about the stitches that had mended torn clothes and lives. One by one, people who had once watched from the sidelines told small stories of Mercy's

steady work—meals shared, a child taught, a woman pulled from the street.

The man’s voice lost its edge. He left with a mutter. The square did not erupt in triumph. It simply returned to its ordinary rhythm—vendors calling, children laughing, the market breathing. Mercy felt the test pass not because one man left but because a community had chosen to stand for repair.

Later that night Emeka’s mother and Nneka came to Mercy’s stall with a small parcel wrapped in plain cloth. They sat together under the dim lamp while the market emptied.

“We have watched you,” Emeka’s mother said. “You have kept your promises. You have not run.”

Nneka placed the parcel in Mercy’s hands. Inside was a simple wooden toy—hand-carved, worn smooth by a child’s grip. “For the children,” Nneka said. “For the ones who will come after us.”

Mercy’s voice was small. “Thank you,” she said. “I will keep walking.”

Emeka’s mother reached out and touched Mercy’s cheek, a gesture that had once been impossible. “Keep coming home,” she said. “That is all we ask.”

Weeks later the mentorship program ran a small market day where the children sold what they had made. The square filled with neighbors who bought woven baskets and sewn dolls, not out of charity but because the goods were good. Ify taught a

younger girl how to count change. Chike showed a boy how to mend a torn seam. Mercy moved among them like a quiet root, steady and unseen.

That night Mercy walked to the river alone. The water moved with the same patient insistence she had come to trust. She thought of Emeka and of the life that could not be returned. She thought of the small, steady acts that had become her life's work.

A voice she had learned to listen for came like a hand on her shoulder: Keep coming home.

She folded the small wooden toy and placed it in her pocket. The harvest was not a single bounty but a season of small returns—trust rebuilt, promises kept, lives tended. Mercy rose and walked back toward the market lights, ready for the next day's work.

Note to the reader: Harvests are rarely sudden. They are the slow gathering of seeds planted in hard soil. Mercy's story shows that repair grows from steady, honest labor and from communities willing to hold one another accountable and to help one another heal.

Short prayer: Lord, help us to tend the seeds of repair with patience and to celebrate the small harvests along the way.

Scripture to remember: And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not — Galatians 6:9 KJV.

Episode 23

Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth — Colossians 3:2 KJV

The market had a different rhythm that week—harvest bustle braided with the steady work of the mentorship stall. Mercy moved through it with a practiced calm, but her heart kept answering to a new, quieter drum. Love, she discovered, arrived like a slow tide: not a single wave but a steady pull.

He came first in the ordinary way of small mercies. Jonah was a carpenter who bought baskets for his sister's wedding. He had hands that smelled of sawdust and a laugh that made Mercy's chest loosen. He watched the children sell and stayed to help when a crate tipped, hauling it upright with a grunt and a grin. He spoke little at first; his kindness showed in the way he fixed a broken chair, in the way he carried water for Mama Uche without being asked. Mercy found herself looking for him in the crowd. The other man arrived like a storm. Emeka's old friend, Daniel, returned to town after months away working in the city. He had a quick smile and a way of speaking that made people listen. He remembered Mercy from before and he did not pretend the past did not exist. He came to the stall with a bouquet of cheap plastic flowers and a directness that startled

Mercy. He offered help, money, plans. He wanted to build something with her, and he said it plainly.

Mercy did not expect to be pulled between two steady hands. Jonah's quiet steadiness felt like a shelter; Daniel's urgency felt like a promise of change. Both men loved her in different ways. Both asked for her trust. Mercy's chest tightened with a confusion she had not felt since the night that had broken everything.

The choice was interrupted by violence. A vendor's boy, drunk on borrowed courage, tried to steal from the mentorship stall. When Mercy stepped between him and the children, the boy shoved her. Jonah reacted first—he grabbed the boy's arm and twisted him away, steady and strong. Daniel moved like a flash, pulling the boy down and pinning him until the guards arrived. The crowd pressed in, voices high.

The cheap-suit man appeared at the edge of the commotion, smirking as if the chaos proved his point about Mercy's danger. Mercy felt the old reflex to run, to hide, to make herself small. Instead she stood and spoke, voice steady. "We will not let fear decide our children's future," she said. The crowd quieted. Jonah's hand found hers for a second—warm, grounding. Daniel's eyes met hers—intense, asking.

The guards took the boy away. The market returned to its rhythm, but the moment had changed the shape of Mercy's choice: both men had acted to protect her and the children, but

in different ways. Jonah's strength was quiet; Daniel's was immediate and forceful. Mercy felt the pull of both.

A week later Daniel asked to speak with Mercy alone. They walked by the river at dusk, the water silver and patient. He took her hand and spoke with a tenderness that made Mercy's throat ache.

"Mercy," he said, "I want to marry you. I want to build a life with you. But I need to know you are mine—truly mine. I want us to be close before we make it official. I want you to sleep with me now, to prove we belong together."

The words landed like a stone. Mercy's breath stopped. The river's sound filled the space between them. Daniel's request was not violent; it was urgent and raw. But it opened a door Mercy had slammed shut years ago. Memories rose—nights of barter and charm, the way she had used her body to survive, the shame that had followed like a shadow. The old life had been a series of compromises that had led her to the pestle and the dark room. Daniel's demand felt like a test that would ask her to step back into the old ways.

She pulled her hand away. "No," she said, voice small but firm. "I will not sleep with you before marriage. I will not go back to what I was. If you love me, you will wait and respect the vows we make."

Daniel's face hardened. "You make this difficult," he said. "I thought you were different."

The hurt in his voice cut like a blade. Mercy felt anger and fear and a fierce, clear resolve. She had chosen a new path—truth, repair, steady work—and she would not trade it for a promise that began with a demand.

As they argued, a shout rose from the bridge. A child had slipped and fallen into the river—one of the younger boys from the program. Without thinking, Jonah dove from the bank. He struck the water with a splash and fought the current, his arms cutting through the cold. Daniel did not hesitate either; he leapt from the bridge and grabbed Jonah's ankle, pulling with a force that nearly dragged them both under.

Mercy ran along the bank, shouting for help. Hands reached down; a rope was thrown. Together, the crowd hauled Jonah and Daniel and the child to the shore. The boy coughed and clung to Mercy's shirt, eyes wide. Jonah lay on the bank, breath heaving, water streaming from his hair. Daniel sat shivering, his face pale.

The rescue changed the air between them. Daniel's demand, raw and selfish, had been followed by a selfless act that risked his life. Jonah's quiet courage had been visible in the water. Mercy looked at both men—one who asked for immediate possession, one who offered steady shelter—and felt the impossible weight of choice. She knelt by Jonah first, checking his breath, then turned to Daniel. "You risked yourself," she said. "But risking your life does not give you the right to demand my body. If you want me, you must ask with patience and respect."

Daniel's jaw worked. He looked at her with a new humility. "I am sorry," he said, voice raw. "I was wrong to ask that. I was afraid of losing you."

Mercy nodded. Fear had driven many of her worst choices. She recognized it now in others. "Then learn to be brave without taking from me," she said. "Love is not a thing you claim by force."

That night Mercy lay awake and the two men's faces turned in her mind like coins. Jonah's quiet steadiness felt like a home she could return to. Daniel's passion felt like a promise of a different life—fast, bright, dangerous. Both had risked themselves for her; both had shown flaws. Mercy's past whispered that she could barter affection for safety; her new life taught her that love must be chosen freely and honored.

She prayed with a voice that trembled. "Lord," she said, "give me wisdom. Help me to choose a path that honors truth and does not return me to old ways. Help me to love rightly."

The silence answered like a hand on her shoulder. Mercy did not have a clear answer. She only had the next day's work, the children who needed her, and the promise she had made to herself: never to let fear or desire push her back into the life that had cost another his life.

Note to the reader: Love can arrive as blessing and as test. Choosing rightly asks for courage, patience, and the refusal to repeat old harms. Mercy's heart is pulled between two good men—one steady, one urgent—and her choice will be shaped

by who honors her boundaries and who will walk the slow road with her.

Short prayer: Lord, grant us wisdom in love and the courage to keep our vows to ourselves and to others.

Scripture to remember: He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city — Proverbs 16:32 KJV.

Episode 24

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding — Proverbs 3:5 KJV

The town felt smaller and larger at once. Mercy moved through it with the weight of decisions pressing at her ribs. Jonah's quiet presence had become a steady rhythm in her days; Daniel's return had stirred a wind she could not ignore. Both men had risked themselves for her, both had shown flaws and courage. The choice pressed like a fever.

She had promised herself she would not rush. Yet life does not wait for certainty. The town's pulse—market, church, river—kept demanding answers. Mercy found herself waking before dawn, hands folded, asking God for a clear heart. The answer did not come as a voice but as a series of moments that would force her to choose.

It began with Jonah. He came to the stall one morning with a small carved box in his palm, sawdust still clinging to his shirt. He sat down without ceremony and opened the box to reveal a simple wooden ring, smoothed by his hands.

"Mercy," he said, voice steady, "I do not have much. I have a bench and a small shop and hands that will work. I want to

build a life that is honest. Will you marry me? Will you let me be the man who stands with you, quietly, every day?”

The market seemed to hush. Mercy’s throat tightened. Jonah’s offer was not grand; it was a covenant of steady labor. She wanted to say yes and to feel the relief of a safe harbor. But Daniel’s face—sharp, impatient, full of promises—rose in her mind. Mercy folded the ring back into the box and asked for time. Jonah nodded, pain and hope braided in his eyes. He left without drama, the kind of man who loved by staying.

That evening Daniel found her by the river. He did not come with a carved ring but with a city-made band and a plan for a life that would move them away from the market’s smallness. He spoke fast, words tumbling like a river in flood.

“Marry me,” he said. “We can leave. I can get work in the city. We can start over. But I need to know you are mine now. I need you to promise me—now.”

The old demand surfaced again, sharper this time. Mercy felt the memory of her past—nights bartered for safety, the pestle, the dark room—like a hand at her throat. Daniel’s urgency smelled of the old life’s bargains.

“No,” she said, voice steady. “I will not promise my body as proof. If you want me, you will wait and build trust. You will not ask me to return to what I have left.”

Daniel’s face split between anger and longing. He reached for her hand and then let it go. “You make this hard,” he said. “I thought love was simpler.”

Mercy watched him walk away, the city lights already in his eyes. She felt both loss and relief. The choice was not only between two men; it was between two versions of herself—one that would barter safety for intimacy and one that would insist on dignity.

The decision was forced by fire. A faulty lantern in the alley behind the market caught a stack of dried palm fronds. Flames licked the wooden eaves and the wind fed them fast. Shouts rose. The market became a chaos of smoke and falling banners.

Jonah was the first to move. He grabbed a bucket and ran into the smoke, hauling a soaked blanket to smother the flames. Daniel charged with a rope and a shout, pulling down a burning beam before it could fall on a child. Mercy did not stand idle. She organized the children, led them away from the heat, and then ran back to help pass buckets.

The blaze became a choreography of risk. Jonah's shoulder took a burn as he shoved a crate away; Daniel's hand bled from a cut when a nail tore his palm. Mercy felt the heat on her face and the taste of smoke in her mouth. She worked until her arms ached, until the last ember was stamped out.

When the smoke cleared, the market was scarred but standing. People gathered, coughing and shaken. Jonah sat on a crate, bandaging his shoulder. Daniel leaned against a post, breathing hard. Both men looked at Mercy with a mixture of admiration and exhaustion.

"You saved the children," Jonah said simply.

“You kept your head,” Daniel added, voice softer than it had been by the river.

Mercy’s heart hammered. The fire had shown them both at their truest—Jonah steady and sacrificial, Daniel bold and immediate. She realized the choice would not be decided by words alone but by the way each man lived when danger came.

Days later a rumor spread that cut like a knife: the cheap-suit man had been seen bribing a council member to restrict Mercy’s stall hours. The market’s politics had always been a low hum; now it rose to a roar. Mercy confronted the council in a meeting that turned heated. Voices rose, chairs scraped, and the cheap-suit man’s allies pressed for a vote.

Daniel stormed into the hall and accused the man openly, his voice ringing. Jonah stood quietly and presented receipts and witnesses—proof that the mentorship fund had been transparent. The council’s gavel fell like a hammer. The cheap-suit man’s plot unraveled in public.

When the meeting ended, the cheap-suit man spat at Daniel and lunged. Jonah stepped between them and took the shove. Daniel reacted with a punch that would have escalated if Mercy had not grabbed his arm and pulled him back. The hall smelled of sweat and anger.

“You could have let him fall,” Daniel hissed.

“I could have,” Jonah said, voice low. “But then what would we be teaching the children?”

Mercy felt the two men's differences like a map. Daniel's fire could protect but also consume. Jonah's restraint protected without becoming violent. Mercy's choice tightened into focus: she wanted a partner who would defend her and the vulnerable without becoming the kind of man who demanded possession.

That night Mercy walked to the river with both proposals heavy in her pocket—the carved ring and the city band. She knelt and let the water move past her fingers. She thought of Emeka and of the cost of choices made in fear. She thought of Ify and the children who learned to stitch and to count. She thought of the slow work that had become her life.

When Jonah came to her the next morning, he did not kneel with a carved ring. He came with a small plan: a modest wedding at the church, a shared bench in his workshop, a promise to keep the mentorship program running. He asked again, quietly, for her hand.

Daniel arrived later, calmer than before, and offered a different promise: patience, respect, and a willingness to wait. He had learned something in the river and the fire and the council hall. He asked Mercy to choose, not to prove him, but to trust him.

Mercy looked at both men—one steady, one changed by his own mistakes. She felt the old fear whisper that she could not be trusted to choose well. She breathed and listened to the small voice she had learned to trust.

"I will not marry out of fear," she said finally. "I will not trade my dignity for a promise. I will marry the man who loves me

without demanding my surrender, who will stand with the children, who will be steady when the world burns and gentle when it does not. I will choose the one who will keep coming home."

Jonah's eyes filled with a quiet hope. Daniel's face held a new humility. Mercy did not speak the name aloud in the market that day. She would not make the choice in public spectacle. She would let the next weeks show who could keep the promises they had made.

Note to the reader: Love tests us in fire and in quiet. Choosing rightly means refusing old bargains and insisting on dignity. Mercy's heart is pulled between two good men; her choice will be shaped by who honors boundaries, who protects without consuming, and who will keep coming home.

Short prayer: Lord, grant us wisdom in love and the courage to choose partners who honor our dignity and walk the slow road with us.

Scripture to remember: Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up — 1 Corinthians 13:4 KJV.

Episode 25

Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour — Ecclesiastes 4:9 KJV

The morning light fell soft across the market, gilding the woven baskets and the edges of the paper flags. Mercy moved through the stalls with a steady step, the carved wooden ring tucked in the pocket of her apron like a small, warm secret. The town had watched her for a long time; now it watched with a new curiosity—would the woman who had rebuilt her life choose a companion to walk beside her?

Ify hummed as she arranged the children's crafts. Jonah arrived with a bundle of planks for a new bench at the workshop. He smiled at Mercy in the way that had become a quiet language between them—no grand words, only steady presence. Daniel came later, hands empty but eyes full of a new humility. He greeted Mercy with a nod that carried apology and respect.

Mercy felt the weight of the choice like a tide. She had promised herself she would not be hurried. Yet the town's rhythm pressed forward: weddings to plan, a new workshop to build, a mentorship program to protect. The vow she would make would not be only for her; it would be a promise to the children, to Emeka's family, to the slow work that had remade her.

They began the day by building. Jonah had invited Mercy and the older boys to help raise a new bench for the mentorship room. The work was honest—measuring, sawing, lifting. The bench was heavy and awkward; a misstep sent a plank slipping. It fell toward Chike, who stumbled back, a cry rising in his throat.

Jonah moved like a man who had learned to carry weight. He lunged, catching the plank with a shoulder that took the blow. The wood grazed his arm, leaving a shallow cut. Daniel reacted too—he grabbed the other end and steadied the load until they could set it down safely. Mercy's heart hammered. The two men had saved a child in the river, fought a blaze, and now had taken a blow for a boy who had once stolen. The scene was a small crucible: courage, risk, and the cost of protecting others.

When the cut bled, Mercy tore a strip of cloth and bound Jonah's arm. He winced but smiled at her with a softness that made her chest ache. Daniel watched, his jaw tight, then stepped forward and offered a clean bandage. The three of them—Mercy, Jonah, Daniel—stood in the dust and saw the truth of themselves reflected in one another.

That evening Jonah walked Mercy to the little chapel behind the market. The building smelled of wax and old wood. A few lanterns burned low. Jonah did not kneel with carved wood this time. He took Mercy's hands in his, sawdust still under his nails, and spoke with a steadiness that had become his gift.

“Mercy,” he said, “I will not promise you a life without trouble. I cannot promise riches or grand things. But I promise to stand with you. I promise to protect the children, to keep the workshop open, and to be honest when I fail. Will you marry me and let me be the man who keeps coming home?”

Mercy looked at him—at the line of his jaw, the calluses on his palms, the way his eyes softened when he looked at the children. She thought of the river, the fire, the nights she had run. She thought of the slow work that had taught her to value steadiness over flash. Her answer rose like a tide.

“Yes,” she said, voice steady. “I will marry you. I will walk with you. But we will keep the promises we have made—to the children, to Emeka’s family, and to the town. We will build a life that honors what we have learned.”

Jonah’s face broke into a smile that was almost a laugh. He slipped the wooden ring onto her finger with hands that trembled. The ring was simple and true. Mercy felt a small peace settle in her chest, not the absence of pain but the presence of a companion who would shoulder it with her.

Word of the vow moved through the market like a wind. Daniel came to the stall the next morning with a quiet that surprised Mercy. He did not demand or plead. He brought a small parcel and a note.

“I was wrong,” he said simply. “I asked for what I wanted without asking what you needed. I thought urgency could replace patience. I am sorry. I will not stand in your way. If you

will have me as a friend, I will help the program and keep my promises."

Mercy felt a complex tenderness. Daniel had been a storm in her life—dangerous, bright, capable of great risk. He had also learned, painfully, to wait and to respect. She reached out and took his hand for a moment, a gesture of forgiveness and of a new kind of bond.

"We will need you," she said. "Not as a husband, but as a brother in the work. Stay with us. Help the children. Keep your hands honest."

Daniel nodded. He stayed. He taught the older boys how to carry beams and how to bargain in the city markets. He became a part of the town's fabric in a different way—no longer a suitor demanding proof, but a man who had learned to give steadiness in return.

They married in the small church at dawn, the congregation a patchwork of faces—vendors, mothers, Emeka's mother and Nneka, Pastor Chike, Grace, Detective Nwankwo, and the children who had learned to stitch and to count. The ceremony was simple: vows spoken in a voice that trembled and then steadied, hands joined, a blessing that felt like a benediction for the slow work.

No sooner had the last hymn faded than a shout rose from the square. A group of men, led by the cheap-suit man, had come to disrupt the celebration. They pushed through the crowd, voices loud, intent on making the day a spectacle of shame.

Jonah did not hesitate. He stepped between the men and the children, his body a shield. Daniel moved like a flash, grabbing the cheap-suit man's arm and holding him until the guards arrived. Mercy stood at the church door and called for calm, her voice carrying like a bell. The crowd closed ranks around the newlyweds. Emeka's mother stepped forward and spoke with a voice that had become a steady law in the town: "This is a day for a child's mother and for a woman who has kept her promises. Leave or be judged by the council."

The men faltered. The cheap-suit man spat and was led away by the guards, his plan undone by a community that had learned to protect what it valued. The wedding resumed with a new intensity—the vows now sealed not only by love but by the town's willingness to stand together.

The morning after the wedding Mercy woke with Jonah's hand in hers. The wooden ring felt warm and real. Outside, the market began to stir. Ify came by with a pot of tea and a grin. The mentorship room hummed with the sound of children learning. Daniel stopped by to drop off a new spool of thread and a promise to lead a weekend class.

Mercy knelt by the river that day and prayed with a voice that was both grateful and wary. "Lord," she said, "thank you for the hands that held me and for the courage to choose rightly. Help us to keep our vows—to each other, to the children, and to the town. Keep us humble and steady."

The river moved on. Mercy rose and walked back to the stall where Jonah waited with a small plan for the workshop's next step. The life ahead would not be easy. There would be new tests, new fires, new nights when the old hunger whispered. But she had chosen a companion who would stand in the smoke and the quiet, who would keep coming home.

Note to the reader: Choosing a partner is not only a matter of the heart but of the life you will build together. Look for steadiness, respect for boundaries, and a willingness to keep promises in public and private. Love that honors dignity and protects the vulnerable is the kind that lasts.

Short prayer: Lord, bless those who choose to walk together in honesty and service. Give them courage to protect the weak and humility to be corrected.

Scripture to remember: Two are better than one; for if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow — Ecclesiastes 4:9 KJV.

Episode 26

Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established — Proverbs 16:3 KJV

The city smelled different from the market—petrol and paper, the sharp tang of opportunity. Ify stepped off the bus with a small backpack and a scholarship letter folded in her hand. Mercy's face hovered in her memory like a promise kept. Now the work was hers: classes, deadlines, a new life that would not be carried on someone else's back.

Ify found a room in a crowded boarding house above a tailor's shop. Her roommate, Ada—no relation to the woman from the market—was a second-year student with quick laughter and a stack of textbooks. They shared a single lamp and a fierce determination. Ify's days filled with lectures, late-night study, and the small economy of student life: borrowed sugar, shared noodles, and the barter of notes.

College taught Ify to measure time differently. Lectures were a drumbeat; assignments were the steady march. She learned to read with a pencil in her hand, to underline not for show but to make ideas stick. Her scholarship covered tuition but not everything; she worked evenings at a campus café, pouring tea and learning the names of professors by the way they ordered.

Small victories arrived like coins: a good grade on a difficult paper, a tutor's nod, a professor who remembered her name. Each one felt like a stitch in a life being rewoven. Ify wrote to Mercy every week—short letters at first, then longer ones that told of small triumphs and the ache of missing home.

One night, returning from a late study group, Ify walked down a dim lane when a shout split the air. A man had grabbed a woman's bag and was running. The campus was quiet; the streetlights were few. Ify's heart hammered. The old lessons—run, hide, survive—rose like a tide. Then she remembered Mercy's steady voice: Count to three. Choose.

She ran.

Two students joined her. They chased the thief through a maze of alleys. The man darted into a courtyard and tried to scale a low wall. Ify lunged, fingers catching the hem of his shirt. He twisted and shoved her; she stumbled but did not let go. The thief slipped, the bag skittered, and a shout from behind brought a security guard running.

The guard cuffed the man. The woman recovered her bag, hands shaking. Ify's palms were scraped and her breath came fast. The students who had chased with her patted her back like comrades. Ada hugged her when she returned to the boarding house, eyes wide.

"You did well," Ada said. "You could have been hurt."

Ify touched the scrape on her palm and felt a fierce pride. She had not only learned to study; she had learned to act. The city was dangerous, but courage could be taught and practiced.

As the semester deepened, Ify faced a different kind of danger: compromise. A senior in her department, a promising researcher named Emeka (no relation), offered to help her with a project that could secure an internship. He had influence and a way of making favors feel like inevitabilities.

"Let me guide your paper," he said one afternoon in the library, voice low. "I can get you the placement. But you must be flexible with time. Come by my office tonight."

Ify felt the old reflex—say yes, accept the shortcut. The memory of Mercy's slow work rose like a shield. Mercy had taught her that quick gains often cost more than they were worth.

She declined politely. Emeka's face tightened. "You're making this hard," he said. "You could go far if you let me help."

Ify walked away with a knot in her stomach. The offer had smelled like opportunity and like the old bargains Mercy had warned her about. She wrote Mercy a long letter that night, honest about the temptation and proud of the refusal.

Weeks later, the department's lab suffered a break-in. Equipment was damaged, and a hard drive with student research vanished. The campus erupted in suspicion. Fingers pointed. Emeka's name surfaced—he had been seen near the lab late the night before. Rumors spread like wildfire.

Ify refused to join the chorus of accusation without proof. She volunteered to help the investigation team catalog what was missing. In the lab's dim light she found a small clue: a torn piece of a security guard's uniform snagged on a broken latch. It did not point to Emeka. It pointed to someone who had access to the guard's route.

When the truth came out—a ring of students who had been selling data to a private firm—Ify felt both relief and a new sorrow. The city's hunger for success had pushed some to steal. She had chosen a different path, but the cost of others' choices rippled through her life.

The semester ended with Ify's project accepted for presentation. She stood before a small panel and spoke with a voice that had learned to be steady. Her research—on community-based micro-enterprises—was rooted in the market where she had grown up. She dedicated the presentation to Mercy and to the children at the mentorship stall.

Afterward a representative from a nonprofit approached her with an internship offer that would pay a modest stipend and give her practical experience. It was not the glittering city job Emeka had hinted at, but it was honest work that fit her values.

Ify accepted.

The internship pulled Ify into the world of community development. She visited neighborhoods, helped design small savings groups, and learned to write grant proposals. She found

that her market experience—counting change, bargaining, teaching children—translated into tools for larger work.

She also began to mentor younger students, offering study tips and a steady presence. Ada watched her with a proud smile. Mercy's letters arrived less often now, but each one was a tether back to the market and to the woman who had taught her to keep promises.

Note to the reader: Ify's life shows that growth is not only academic; it is moral and practical. Courage is learned in small acts—chasing a thief, refusing a shortcut, staying to catalog the damage. The city will test you; choose the path that keeps your hands honest.

Short prayer: Lord, give us courage to act rightly in danger and wisdom to refuse easy compromises.

Scripture to remember: The just shall live by his faith — Habakkuk 2:4 KJV.

Episode 27

Be still, and know that I am God — Psalm 46:10 KJV

The city at night was a sheet of distant lights and muffled engines. Ify sat by her single lamp, a stack of notes spread like a small battlefield across the table. The scholarship letter in her drawer felt both like a passport and a chain. She had come to learn, to build, to repay Mercy's faith with steady work. Now the city asked more of her than exams: it asked for choices that would shape who she would become.

The seminar room smelled of chalk and coffee. A visiting professor spoke about development models that sounded like maps to a better world. Ify listened, pencil poised, until a slide flashed a case study—her own market, described in academic language, stripped of faces and names. The professor praised efficiency and metrics and then, almost casually, suggested that small programs needed "strategic partners" who could scale them quickly.

Ify felt the words like a hand on her throat. Scaling meant money, and money meant compromises she had seen whispered in the city: favors traded for placements, data sold for quick grants. The professor's final line—"results justify methods"—hung in the air like a challenge.

She left the room with her chest tight. The city's logic was seductive: faster impact, bigger numbers, a name on a report. Mercy's slow work—letters, stitches, a child taught to count—felt suddenly fragile beside the professor's charts. Ify realized that knowledge could be a weapon as easily as a tool.

A thin envelope arrived the next morning. Mercy's handwriting was the same—steady, small. The letter was short: Mama Uche's cough had worsened; the stall needed a new awning; Ify's younger cousin had failed an exam and needed tutoring. The list was a quiet litany of needs that would not wait for grant cycles or academic conferences.

Ify read the letter twice. The city offered scale and prestige; the market offered immediate, human need. The scholarship covered tuition but not the small emergencies that made life in the market precarious. Mercy's faith had been a bridge; now Ify stood on it and felt the weight of two worlds.

She folded the letter and pressed it to her chest. The city's bright promises felt colder than the market's warm, messy demands. Ify's hands trembled with a decision that was not about career but about loyalty and the shape of her soul.

A week later a representative from a well-funded NGO asked to meet Ify after her presentation. They praised her research and offered an internship that would pay well and place her on a fast track to a policy job. The stipend would cover Mama Uche's medicine and the awning. The offer came with a caveat: the

NGO wanted data, quick pilot results, and a willingness to adapt methods to donor priorities.

Ify sat in the café afterward, the city's noise a distant roar. The internship was everything a young scholar could want. But the caveat tasted like compromise. She thought of Mercy teaching a child to stitch, of the wooden toy in the stall, of promises kept in public and private.

The temptation was not only practical; it was seductive. The city promised that Ify's name could be on reports, that her work could reach beyond the market. The market promised that a child would eat and a woman would keep her stall. Ify felt the two futures like two hands pulling at her sleeve.

That night Ify walked the campus paths alone. The moon was a thin coin. She opened Mercy's letter again and read it aloud into the quiet, as if the words could be a prayer. We need you here, she whispered, and the phrase landed like a bell.

She imagined telling Mercy that she had chosen the city, that she would send money and reports and occasional visits. She imagined Mercy's face—proud, wounded, steady. The thought of Mercy's disappointment felt heavier than the fear of poverty.

Ify thought of the professor's charts and the NGO's offer and of the children who had learned to count under Mercy's patient hand. She felt the old hunger—the urge to prove herself, to escape scarcity by any means. Then she felt something else: a memory of Mercy's voice, of the way Mercy had taught her to refuse shortcuts, to keep promises even when no one watched.

The city’s lights blurred. Ify sat on a bench and let the decision settle like a stone. She did not want to romanticize sacrifice; she wanted to be honest about limits. She also did not want to trade her integrity for a faster name on a report.

In the morning Ify wrote a letter to the NGO. She thanked them and asked for time—time to design a pilot that would be accountable to the community, time to include local trustees and transparent reporting. She proposed a model that would not extract data for donors alone but would build a small fund managed with the market’s people at the table. It was not the immediate yes they had hoped for. It was not a refusal either. It was Ify’s attempt to hold both worlds: the city’s resources and the market’s dignity. She sent the letter and then bought a bus ticket home with the first month’s stipend, a small, deliberate act.

At the stall Mercy hugged her when she arrived, and Ify felt the knot in her chest loosen. They spoke late into the night—plans, boundaries, the new pilot. Ify realized that choosing the slow path did not mean rejecting progress; it meant insisting that progress be shaped by those it served.

Note to the reader: Dramatic choices are often quiet. The city will offer speed and scale; the market will ask for patience and presence. Ify’s decision shows that integrity can be a strategy, not only a sacrifice.

Short prayer: Lord, give us wisdom to balance ambition with fidelity and courage to build change that honors the people it serves.

Scripture to remember: But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you — Matthew 6:33 KJV.

Episode 28

The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit — Psalm 34:18 KJV

The harmattan had returned with a thin, cruel wind. Mama Uche's cough deepened into a rattle that would not ease. Emeka's mother, who had carried grief with a quiet dignity, grew thinner in the weeks that followed. Mercy and Ify traded nights at the clinic and days at the stall; the mentorship room hummed with whispered prayers and the soft clack of needles.

The town watched and helped in small, human ways—soup left at the door, a neighbor's blanket, a child sent with a message. Mercy sat by Emeka's mother's bed and read aloud the letters she had written to the town, the same letters that had once been her lifeline. The old woman's eyes would open and hold Mercy's as if weighing the truth of a life.

Doctors called it a lung infection complicated by years of hard work and a body worn thin. Medicine eased the fever but could not mend the long wear. Emeka's mother accepted help with a stubborn grace; she refused pity and took the small mercies offered—tea, a warm cloth, the sound of children's laughter from the street.

One night the fever spiked. Mercy sat with her, fingers laced in the old woman's, and Ify slept on a chair with a shawl over her knees. The room smelled of eucalyptus and the faint sweetness of boiled cassava. Emeka's mother opened her eyes and, with a voice that had the brittle clarity of someone who had lived long enough to know what mattered, said, "Keep coming home. Keep them safe."

Mercy promised. The words felt like a vow and a benediction. The old woman smiled once, small and fierce, and then the breath that had been steady all her life thinned and stopped. The room held its silence like a thing that could not be broken.

The funeral was a small, sorrowful procession. Vendors closed their stalls; the market's usual clamor softened to a hush. Emeka's sister and Nneka stood like pillars of grief and restraint. Mercy moved among them with a face that had learned to hold sorrow without collapsing. She had tried to repair what she could; she had kept promises; she had not been able to keep time.

At the graveside, Emeka's mother's friends spoke of a life of work and quiet courage. Mercy placed the wooden toy Nneka had given her into the child's small hands and felt the weight of what could not be undone. The town wept in a way that was both private and communal—tears for a woman who had lost a son, for a child who would grow without a mother's voice, for the slow cost of lives lived on the edge.

That night Mercy walked to the river and let the water take the sound of her grief. She prayed with a voice that was raw and honest: "Lord, I could not save her. Help me to keep the promises I made to her and to Emeka's child." The river moved on, patient and indifferent, and Mercy rose with the knowledge that sorrow would be a companion for a long time.

Short prayer: Lord, comfort those who mourn and give us strength to keep the promises made in grief.

Episode 29

Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep — Romans 12:15 KJV

Grief did not leave the market; it braided itself into the days. Yet life, stubborn and tender, continued. Mercy and Jonah married in the small church with the town gathered like a careful chorus. The ceremony was simple—vows spoken with hands clasped, a blessing that felt like a promise to keep walking together.

Ify stood at Mercy's side, proud and steady. Daniel came as a friend, his face calm. Emeka's mother's absence was a hollow that the town felt in its bones, but the wedding was a place where sorrow and joy met and did not cancel one another.

Jonah and Mercy set up a small home above the workshop. The bench they had built became a table; the wooden ring warmed on Mercy's finger. The mentorship room expanded with the NGO's modest support, and the children's laughter returned like a fragile bell. Mercy found a new rhythm—market at dawn, workshop at midday, evenings with Jonah and the children.

The town's watchfulness remained. Emeka's family visited often; Nneka's eyes were still careful, but she smiled more than she had in months. Mercy kept the promise she had made at

the river: she came home, again and again, to the work that had become her life.

Months later Mercy gave birth to a daughter. The labor was long and fierce; Jonah's hand held hers through the pain. When the child arrived she was small and loud, a bright, urgent thing that made the room tilt toward hope. They named her Ada—after the woman who had once been robbed and then taught Mercy about faith in anger; the name felt like a circle closing and opening.

Ada's first cry was a sound that made the market's edges soften. Ify wept openly, and even Nneka's face broke into a smile that was almost a laugh. The town gathered with small gifts—blankets, a carved toy, a pot of stew. Mercy held her daughter and felt a fierce, protective love that was both joy and a new kind of fear.

She prayed over the child with a voice that trembled. "Lord, keep this light. Help me to be the mother she needs. Help me to keep my promises so she can grow without the shadows that followed me."

For a time the house was full of small, ordinary happiness: a child's coo, Jonah's quiet humming as he carved a new toy, Ify's visits with news of the internship. The sorrow of the past did not vanish, but it softened around the edges with the presence of a new life.

Short prayer: Lord, bless this child and give her a life of light and steady love.

Episode 30

Train up a child in the way she should go: and when she is old, she will not depart from it — Proverbs 22:6 KJV

Years folded like pages. Ada grew with a bright curiosity that made Mercy's heart both glad and wary. She learned to count with Ify, to stitch with the older boys, to run errands with Jonah. The town watched her with the same mixture of hope and caution it had watched Mercy. Mercy taught her to be honest, to keep promises, and to stand when it was hard.

But the past is a long shadow. Mercy knew, in the quiet places of the night, that the iniquity that had once shaped her life—choices made in fear, bargains struck in darkness—would not vanish simply because a child was born. She held Ada and whispered vows: to teach her truth, to protect her from the compromises that had once cost so much, to be a different kind of mother.

The mentorship program became a small institution in the town. Ify's pilot model, shaped by community trustees, grew slowly and honestly. Daniel ran weekend classes in the city and returned with new tools. Jonah's workshop became a place where boys and girls learned a trade and a way to be steady.

The fund for children's schooling continued, transparent and watched.

The town's life was a tapestry of small acts—meals shared, stitches mended, a child taught to read. Mercy's marriage and Ada's birth were threads in that tapestry, bright and necessary. The grief of Emeka's mother's death remained a wound, but it had also become a reminder: promises must be kept, and repair is a lifetime's work.

On a quiet evening, Mercy walked the market with Ada asleep on her back. She paused by the river and thought of Emeka's mother—her courage, her last words, the way the town had gathered to bury her. Mercy felt the sorrow like a stone in her pocket and the joy like a small flame. She knew the story was not finished; the child she held would carry both light and the echo of what had come before.

She pressed her forehead to Ada's small head and prayed, not for a life without shadow, but for the strength to teach the child to walk in the light despite it. "Lord," she whispered, "help me to be the mother she needs. Help me to keep the promises I made to those I have hurt."

The river moved on. The market lights blinked. The town slept with a fragile peace.

THE END

If this book has blessed your life, remember to say a prayer for the author, Anthony Ijere, that the fire of God will continually burn on his altar. Also, as a free gift of love to him and the ministry, to help publish or produce more of these impactful books, your contributions in cash or in kind are warmly welcomed.

Account Details (Nigeria)

Account Name: Macanthony Ijere
Bank Name: Sterling Bank
Account Number: 0138431203
SWIFT/BIC: NAMENGLA
Bank Address: Lagos, Nigeria.

Account Details (United States)

Account Name: Macanthony Meniye Ijere
Bank Name: Wells Fargo
Account Number: 406302318512941 96
Routing Number: 121000248
Account Type: Checking
SWIFT/BIC: WFBIUS6SXXX
Bank Address: 651 N Broad St, Suite 206, Middletown, 19709 Delaware, US

Contact Him on

WhatsApp: +2349133400801
Email: anthonyijere@yahoo.com
Facebook: Anthony Ijere
Instagram: @anthony.ijere

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Most importantly: Please feel free to continue sharing these free books as a tool of evangelism. We have been receiving testimonies of how lives are being touched, and we give all glory to God.

About the AUTHOR

Anthony Ijere is a contemporary Nigerian Christian author, novelist, and spiritual teacher dedicated to inspiring believers through the written word. Based in Ahoada, Rivers State, he combines deep biblical insight with engaging storytelling to encourage spiritual growth, faith, deliverance, ministry and godly living.

Anthony's works explore themes of prayer, destiny, spiritual warfare, obedience, and personal transformation, offering practical guidance for living a life that glorifies God. His writing reflects a unique blend of narrative creativity and devotional teaching, making complex spiritual truths accessible and relatable, particularly within the Nigerian context.

A passionate servant of God, Anthony draws inspiration from sermons by notable ministers such as Apostle Joshua Selman, infusing his books with principles that strengthen faith and awaken spiritual potential. Beyond writing, he mentors young people, ministers in local communities, and leads initiatives that cultivate prayer, purpose, and Christian character.

Through his books, Anthony Ijere seeks to equip believers to fulfill their divine calling, walk in excellence, and leave a lasting legacy for Christ.

