

And
MARY
THE MOTHER OF GOOD

*Cultural Shapers: How Ordinary Women
Changed the Status Quo*



Revised and Expanded Edition

AZUKA D. ORUMGBE

For my mother,

Madam Janet Imuetinyan Orumgbe

1958 – 2025

the first Mother of Good I ever knew.

And Mary, the Mother of Good
Revised and Expanded Edition

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References to the Qur'an are cited by surah and verse and paraphrased.

The retelling of Mary's story in Part I combines Scripture, early Christian tradition and the author's imagination; see "A Note on How Mary's Story Is Told."

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Watch the Mothers of Good Show: youtube.com/@mothersofgood

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This isn't just about writing a book. It's about flipping the script on what it means to be a young woman today. It's about raising a generation of girls who grow up God-fearing, creative, disciplined and purposeful — girls who become good wives, mothers, friends and mentors, and yes, leaders who dare to challenge the status quo.

Mary Today

Mary isn't just a name. It is a symbol of hope, courage and purpose. It stands for every woman who says, "I won't let the world define me. I will live for something greater." Women like Mother Teresa, who heard all the noise around her and chose to listen to a higher calling. Women who dare to be rebels — not in the destructive sense, but rebels with a cause.

This book is a call to young women everywhere: *Be a Mary*.

Why I Wrote This Book

I wrote this book because I believe in the power of the girl child. Every young girl has the capacity to change her world, but she needs guidance, encouragement and a voice reminding her that she is more than the latest trend or viral sensation. She is powerful. She is purposeful. And she is needed.

Preface



Every girl who decides to live for what truly matters writes a story that echoes for generations.

When I was thirteen, my life took a turn I was not prepared for. A young lady — probably as clueless as I was — left a mark on me, one that stole my teenage years and much of my young adulthood. Those were dark days, and if I am honest, some of the scars still linger. Yet when I look back now, I see something beautiful that grew out of that pain: a question that has never left me.

Where are the women like Mary?

Where are the women who birth good into a broken world? The ones who refuse to bow to fleeting trends, shiny distractions and the empty promises of today's culture? The ones who choose substance over applause?

The first edition of this book was my attempt to answer that question. This revised edition is my attempt to answer it better.

Why a New Edition

A lot has happened since that first printing. On 10 September 2025, I buried my mother, Madam Janet Imuetinyan Orungbe. For most of my life I had been writing about "Mothers of Good" without fully realising that I had been raised by one. Sitting with her story after she was gone, I understood that the question I asked at thirteen had been answered in my own house all along — by a woman who had very little schooling, no inheritance and no one cheering for her, and who still built a life that fed, housed and lifted dozens of people.

Her chapter is now the last one in this book. It is the hardest thing I have ever written, and I think it is the truest.

I have also added the story of Deborah Chizaram Nnamani, a young Nigerian woman whose short life and bright faith moved many of us, and the stories of three more women who deserve to stand in this company: Queen Idia of Benin, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti of Abeokuta and Mary Slessor of Calabar. Every other chapter has been carefully re-edited. Major factual claims have been reviewed, uncertain attributions have been marked, and the lessons sharpened so that they speak to the girl scrolling on her phone in Benin, Lagos, Enugu, Accra or London today.

Not Just a Book for Girls and Women

At first glance, you might think this is a book only for girls. After all, it is called *And Mary, the Mother of Good*. But here is the twist: it is for everyone. When women get it right, the world changes. A focused, disciplined, God-centred woman has the power to influence her home, her community and even her nation. Fathers need this book to understand the daughters they are raising. Young men need it to understand the kind of woman worth honouring. Teachers, pastors and mentors need it because the girls in front of them are listening to many voices, and not all of those voices love them.

This is not a book of dry advice or lectures. It is a story. A journey. A collection of lessons and moments designed to inspire, challenge and equip you to live differently.

How This Book Works

Part I retells the story of Mary of Nazareth as a living, breathing teenage girl, and then draws ten insights from her life. Part II introduces eighteen women across three thousand years — queens and farm girls, scientists and singers, a prophetess, a president and a timber trader from Esan — each of whom, in her own way, refused to let the culture around her set the

limits of her calling. At the end of each insight and chapter you will find a few questions. Don't skip them. Take a pen. Talk about them with a friend, a daughter, a youth group. That is where the book stops being mine and starts being yours.

A Final Word

If you are reading this, know that you are holding more than a book. You are holding an invitation to step into a better story — not just for yourself, but for everyone your life touches.

So, to every young girl out there: being a woman is powerful, and choosing to do good is revolutionary.

Let's rewrite the narrative together.

Azuka D. Orumgbe

Benin City, Nigeria

September, 2026

A N I N V I T A T I O N

Watch the Mothers of Good Show



This book does not end on the last page. The stories continue on screen.

On the **Mothers of Good Show** on YouTube, we sit down with Mothers of Good both young and old — grandmothers who built families and businesses from nothing, young women using their gifts for God, teachers, leaders, traders and dreamers. You will hear their stories in their own voices: the struggles, the laughter, the prayers and the lessons.

Scan the code with your phone camera, subscribe, turn on notifications, and join the conversation in the comments. Share an episode with your class, your youth group or your mother. And if you know a Mother of Good whose story should be heard, tell us about her.



youtube.com/@mothersofgood

Channel ID: UC5ibq5Y1AlFpPu2h41sOUsw

Ordinary Women. Extraordinary Impact.

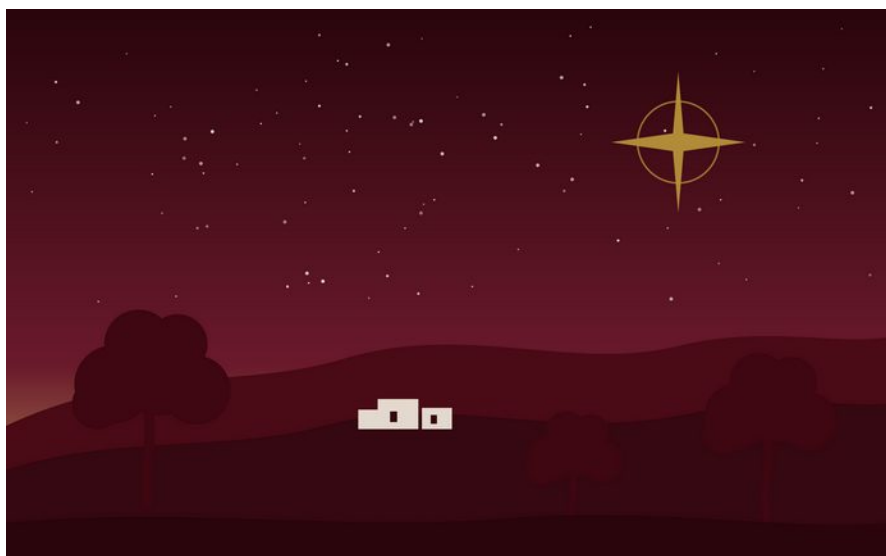
A Note on How Mary's Story Is Told



Part I of this book tells Mary's story the way we tell stories around the fire in Nigeria: with colour, dialogue and a little humour. Because Mary is so important to Christians, I want to be clear about what comes from where.

- **The Bible.** The angel Gabriel's visit, Mary's words "Let it be to me according to your word," her visit to Elizabeth and her great song of praise (the Magnificat) come from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 1. Where I quote Scripture directly, I give the reference.
- **Christian tradition.** The names of Mary's parents, Joachim and Anne, and the story of her childhood come from an early Christian writing called the *Protoevangelium of James* (also called the Gospel of James), written in the second century. It is not part of the Bible, and historians treat its details with caution. I use it because it has shaped how Christians have imagined Mary for nearly two thousand years, and I say so whenever I draw on it.
- **Islamic tradition.** The Qur'an also honours Mary (Maryam). Where I mention it, I cite the surah and verse and paraphrase the meaning.
- **My imagination.** The conversations between Mary, Anna, Joachim and Joseph, the market day, the nuts in the sand and the jokes are my own retelling. They are not history. They are there to help us imagine Mary as a real young woman rather than a distant religious figure: not a statue in a church, but a girl with a mother who shouted her name, a young man she loved, ordinary routines, and a decision that would cost her dearly.

If you ever find yourself unsure which is which, go back to Luke 1. Everything in this book should send you back to the Bible, not replace it.



PART ONE

And Mary, the Mother of Good



Everything Good Has a Process

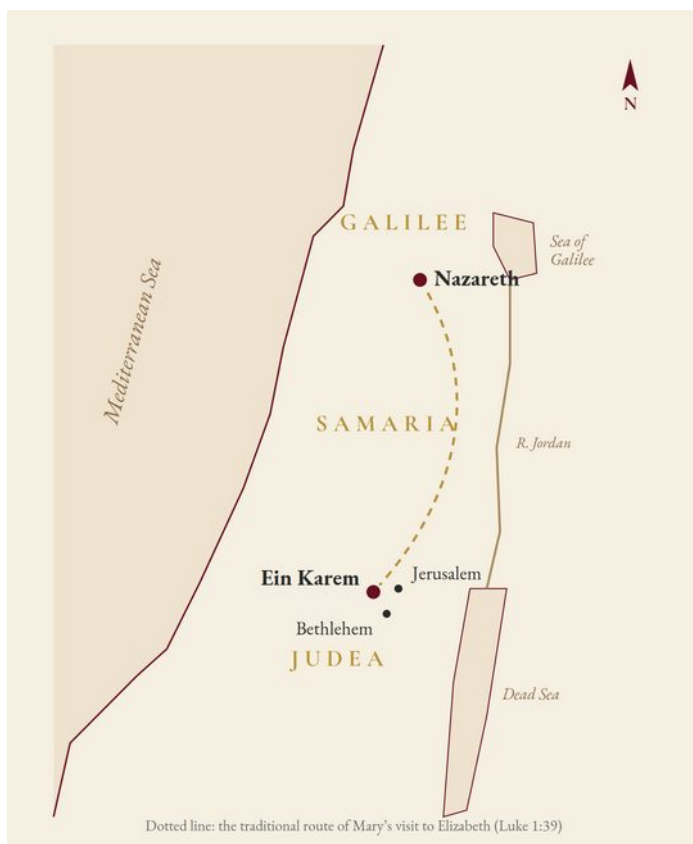


*Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was
very good.*

— Genesis 1:31 (NKJV)

It is nine o'clock on a cold morning in Nazareth, a small village tucked into the hills of Galilee. The wind is blowing gently across the terraces of olive trees. And listen — there is no noise. No engines roaring. Nothing flying over your head (otherwise known as an aeroplane). Nothing buzzing in your pocket to disturb your mind (otherwise known as a mobile phone). No jealousy-brewer called Instagram. No distraction machine called Twitter, sorry, X. Just the wind singing through the trees, the birds on the stone walls, and the voices of little children chanting and running around, half-naked, playing in the dust.

Christian tradition commemorates the angel's visit — the Annunciation — on 25 March. The historical year cannot be fixed precisely; historians commonly place Jesus' birth a few years before the traditional line between BC and AD. Life in Nazareth is simple. Hard, yes. But simple.



The world of Mary: Nazareth in Galilee, where she grew up, and Ein Karem near Jerusalem, where tradition says she visited her cousin Elizabeth.

Nazareth was a village so small and ordinary that people joked about it. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" someone asked years later (John 1:46). Remember that question. This whole book is an answer to it.

More than a hundred kilometres to the south, in the hills just outside Jerusalem, lies another village called Ein Karem. Christian tradition remembers it as the home of Mary's cousin Elizabeth and the birthplace of John the Baptist. Today pilgrims climb its winding streets to the Church of the Visitation, built where Mary is said to have greeted Elizabeth when both women were pregnant. The hills there are covered with olive groves,

fig trees, almond trees and vines, with wildflowers and herbs growing between the old stones. Mary would come to know that road well.

But this morning she is at home.

Sitting on the ground outside the house is a young Mary, digging dried nuts out of the sand where they were buried to keep them fresh.

CHRISTIAN TRADITION, NOT SCRIPTURE

According to the *Protoevangelium of James*, a second-century writing that is not part of the Bible, Mary's parents were Joachim and Anne. Anne had been childless for many years and was old when Mary was born. The same writing claims Mary was given to serve in the Temple in Jerusalem from the age of three — a detail most historians consider unlikely.

And then the peace of the morning is broken.

"Mary! Where is this girl?"

Anna's voice echoes through the house, half frustration, half urgency. "When are you coming to help me? Your father's jute bags need to be fetched. He is already late for the fruit market!"

"I'm coming, Mama!" Mary calls back. "Some of the nuts sank so deep in the sand. I'm trying to get them out."

CHRISTIAN TRADITION

In the stories that grew up around Mary, Joachim was a respected and prosperous man of the tribe of Judah. He wore many hats, from shepherding to trading, and people knew him for his generosity to the poor and his gifts to the Temple.

A few minutes pass. Anna is not a patient woman this morning.

"Mary! Mary! Is your father even close to ready?"

"Mama, why do you doubt him?" Mary laughs. "He has eaten already, and he wants to reach the market early. You know it's market day. Speed is everything."

If you grew up in Nigeria, you know exactly what kind of morning this is. Among the Igbo it would be *Eke* day — one of the four market days, Eke, Orie, Afọ and Nkwọ, that make up the traditional Igbo week. Market day is not a day for dulling. Whoever reaches the market first gets the best spot and the first customers.

(Every Nigerian child knows this voice. It is the same voice that calls your full name — first name, middle name and surname — when you have forgotten the rice on the fire.)

"I'm bringing the nuts. Don't worry," Mary adds. Anna's scolding is still ringing in her ears.

CHRISTIAN TRADITION

Joachim and Anne had prayed for a child for years. The tradition says an angel finally announced to them that, in their old age, they would have a daughter. Overflowing with gratitude, they promised to raise her for God.

"May peace guide you, my daughter," Anna says, softening as she takes the nuts. "Put them in the basket. I think your father is finally ready."

In this retelling, Mary is quieter than many girls her age. While others love crowds and companionship, she finds peace in the stillness of home and in simple things. She is beautiful, but beauty is not the centre of her story.

Joachim appears at the door, adjusting his bag. "Greetings, my dear. I seem to be running a little late today."

"Ah, it's not me o, Joachim!" Anna protests. "I was trying to mend this wooden cabinet by myself. Joseph has not come to make the new one for us."

"Joseph must be swamped," Joachim says. "His name as a carpenter is spreading like wildfire. The young man must be juggling plenty of jobs." He pauses. "Anyway, I sent Egbe to remind him early this morning, and he promised he would come and fix things."

HISTORY

Galilee in Mary's day was under Roman rule, heavily taxed and restless. Many Jewish families lived in hope that God would soon send the promised Messiah to set His people free. In our story, Joachim is one of those hopeful men.

Just then, someone knocks. Mary's heart jumps. She knows that knock.

It is Joseph.

Joseph is a gifted carpenter — a *tekton*, a builder who works with wood and stone. But what sets him apart is not only his skill. He is humble and hardworking, the kind of young man mothers pray for. He stands at the door with his tools balanced in both arms.

"I would embrace you," he says, smiling, "but these tools would clatter all over the floor."

Mary laughs. "Not even a friendly hug? You can't manage that one?"

"You're meeker than Moses," she teases when he shakes his head. Joseph brushes her hair playfully aside and gives her a gentle push.

"Yahweh has given me no licence to hug you until we marry, remember?" he says with a wry smile. Mary lets a mischievous grin escape and steps aside to let him in.

"Mary! Let the man enter!" Anna shouts from inside.

Joseph walks in and — as any well-brought-up Nigerian son would recognise — kneels before Anna to greet her. (Young men, take note. In Benin, a good greeting is half of the bride price.)

"Mama, you sent for me three days ago, but urgent work held me back," he explains. "I was supposed to come yesterday, but it was already dark when I finished Pa Zacharias's work. When Egbe came to call me this morning, I was already on my way here. I'm truly sorry, Mama."

Anna, moved by his respect, tells him to rise. "We understand, my son. Work is work." Then she points at the rickety porch. "That is the problem. We need to expand it."

As they talk, Mary cannot take her eyes off Joseph. There is admiration in her eyes — and, if we are honest, a small spark of jealousy that he is being so sweet to her mother.

Everybody in Nazareth knew about these two. The grapevine was buzzing. People from all walks of life had noticed the chemistry, and whispers of the coming wedding had even reached the ears of the village elders.

HISTORY

In Jewish custom of the time, marriage happened in two stages. First came the betrothal — a binding legal agreement. From that moment the couple were considered husband and wife, even though the bride continued to live in her father's house. About a year later came the wedding itself, when the groom took his bride home. Girls were often betrothed young, in their early-to-mid teens, though ages varied. Luke 1:27 tells us that when the angel came, Mary was already "betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph."

"Mary, did you hear what I said?"

Anna's voice snaps Mary out of her daydream.

"Mama, what did you say? Since when did my ears start betraying me?" Mary grins, and even Anna has to laugh.

"No, my dear. I asked you to help me count the timbers on the balcony. Joseph needs to know what else to bring."

While Mary counts, Joachim comes out of his room, dressed and ready. "Look who's here!" he says, chuckling. "I knew you would come while Anna was still talking. Now she can see for herself. You are quite the gentleman, aren't you?"

Joseph kneels to greet him, explains his delay again, and Joachim waves it away. With a twinkle in his eye he adds, "Anna knows carpentry better than me, sef. Let her supervise you."

The morning sun is climbing now, and Joachim remembers he is late. "All right, Anna, I'm off to the market. Joseph, I trust you have things under control here. I'll see you when I return."

As the door closes behind him, Mary's eyes meet Joseph's, and they share a tender smile. The truth is that Joseph's schedule was full that day. It was Mary who had drawn him to this house. And both of them knew it. That, perhaps, is the essence of true love: finding the time, whatever else life demands.

HISTORY

Nobody knows Mary's exact age. Later writings guessed between twelve and fourteen at her betrothal, and up to about seventeen during her pregnancy, but these sources are not reliable. What we can say is that she was young — very young by today's standards — and that God trusted her anyway.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- Mary's ordinary morning — chores, market day, a mother shouting her name — was the setting for the greatest news in history. What does that tell you about the "ordinary" days of your own life?
- Joseph honoured Mary and her family. What does respect in a relationship look like to you?

What God Cannot Do Does Not Exist



For with God nothing will be impossible.

— Luke 1:37 (NKJV)

Every day, Mary rose and slept with the same routine. Her parents' work was her life's work: sowing, drying, storing, selling. Once again she was outside, tending the seeds and burying them carefully in the dry sand. The rhythm of her hands was steady, but her mind was elsewhere. She had left something inside — the little tool she needed for packing — so she sighed, got up and went in to fetch it.

It was during one of these ordinary tasks that destiny began to unfold its script.

When Mary stepped back outside, her feet silent on the sand, she saw something that should not have been possible. A white shadow was moving across the yard — pale, glowing, and coming closer.

How can a shadow be white?

Fear wrapped its cold fingers around her heart. Every instinct in her body told her to *japa* — to run, to escape whatever this was that defied all logic.

I understand that feeling. When I was a young boy in secondary school, I was in Borden House. One night I woke up to go and ease myself. As I stepped outside, what I saw was a very tall figure clothed in white. Instantly, the desire to wee disappeared. The next thing I remember, I was back on my bed. I cannot explain that night, and I am not going to try. But

it taught me that there is far more to this world than what our natural eyes can see.

So I understand the drumbeat of Mary's heart, pounding so loudly in her ears that it drowned out everything else. Just as a scream rose to her lips, she felt a touch, light as a feather, on her left shoulder.

"Mary."

The voice was soft, almost a whisper, and it seemed to come from somewhere beyond this world. Time stood still. Mary turned around, and her breath left her.

The shadow was a man, clothed in garments as white as purity itself. Peace and power flowed from him together. His face shone with a light that did not come from the sun. And instead of fear, Mary found herself lost in his gaze — a gaze that seemed to see straight through ordinary life into something eternal.

"Hello, sir," she managed. "Who are you?"

The ordinary had shattered. It was as if the old stories she had grown up hearing — about Abraham, about Moses at the bush, about Gideon threshing wheat — had suddenly walked into her compound and pulled her into the story.

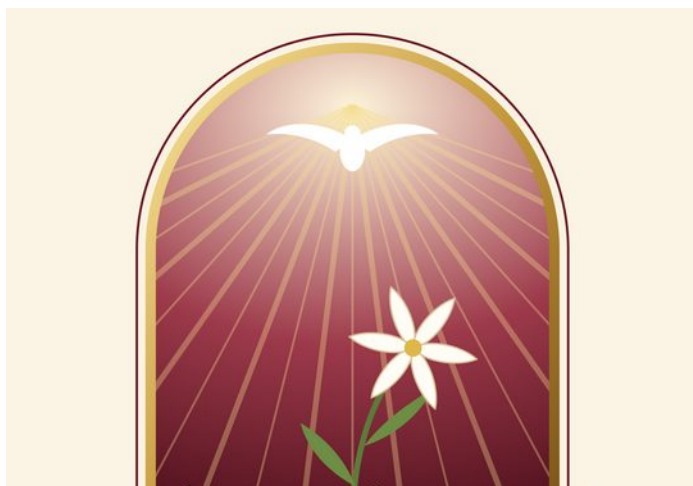
The man smiled.

"Rejoice, highly favoured one," he said. "The Lord is with you; blessed are you among women." (Luke 1:28)

Luke tells us that Mary "was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was" (Luke 1:29). In other words, she was confused. Favoured? Her? A village girl from Nazareth?

"Do not be afraid, Mary," the angel continued, "for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne

of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." (Luke 1:30–33)



The Annunciation: light, a dove for the Holy Spirit, and a lily for purity. Symbolic illustration.

Mary's heart raced as the words unfolded like the petals of a strange flower. She began to experience what I call *beautiful confusion* — the confusion of someone who knows something wonderful is happening but cannot yet understand it.

"How can this be," she asked, "since I do not know a man?" (Luke 1:34)

Notice that. Mary asked a question. Faith is not the same as never asking questions. Zechariah, the priest, had asked the angel a question too, and was struck silent because his question came from unbelief (Luke 1:18–20). Mary's question came from wonder. She was not asking *whether*; she was asking *how*.

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you," the angel answered, "and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:35)

Holy Spirit? What did that even mean to a teenage girl in first-century Galilee? Christians would later spend centuries explaining that the Holy

Spirit is not a force or a feeling, but God Himself — a distinct Person, fully God, who lives in and guides those who believe. Mary did not have the theology. What she had was an angel standing in her yard, and a promise.

Then the angel gave her something to hold on to.

"Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible." (Luke 1:36–37)

Elizabeth? Pregnant? Everyone knew Elizabeth could not have children.

And then Mary said the words that changed the world:

*"Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let
it be to me according to your word." —
Luke 1:38*

With those words, Mary's surrender echoed through heaven and earth like a song. The angel's smile deepened. Something had been agreed in that moment that could never be undone.

And then he was gone.

Mary stood alone in the yard. The light faded. The birds were singing again as if nothing had happened.

What just happened?

The reality began to sink in like a stone dropped into a still pond, sending ripples through every part of her. The weight of the message sat on her young shoulders — an honour, yes, but also a responsibility heavier than anything she had ever carried.

"Can this be real?" she whispered. "Is it a dream? What will people say? How will I explain this to anybody? To Mama? To Papa? To *Joseph*?"

The questions swirled like a harmattan dust storm. She looked around as if the ground itself could give her answers.

And then, softly, she said to herself:

"But what God cannot do does not exist."

It became her mantra — her paraphrase of the angel's promise that nothing is impossible with God. She closed her eyes and let the truth sink in. The same God who had guided her ancestors, who had parted the Red Sea and spoken from a burning bush, was now inviting *her* into the next chapter of His story.

When she opened her eyes, the late sun was warm on her face, and it seemed to carry a deeper meaning. The whole creation seemed to be echoing the refrain:

What God cannot do does not exist.

"I will embrace this calling," she said, "no matter the challenges. I am not alone."

In that moment, Mary made a silent covenant with God. She accepted a path that made no human sense but carried the promise of divine guidance. With a heart both heavy and light, she walked back into the house.

Nothing looked different. The same walls, the same pots, the same half-mended cabinet. But everything *was* different. The ordinary had given way to the extraordinary, and a village girl's life was now woven into a story that spans eternity.

The road ahead was full of mystery. Joseph would struggle. Neighbours would talk. A long journey to Bethlehem, a birth in a stable, and a flight into Egypt were all waiting in the years ahead. But Mary knew one thing for certain: she was not alone.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- Mary asked "How can this be?" before she said "Let it be." Is there a question you are afraid to bring to God?
- What is one "impossible" thing in your life that you need to hand over with the words, "What God cannot do does not exist"?

Why Mary and Not Amaka?



Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfilment of those things which were told her from the Lord.

— Luke 1:45 (NKJV)



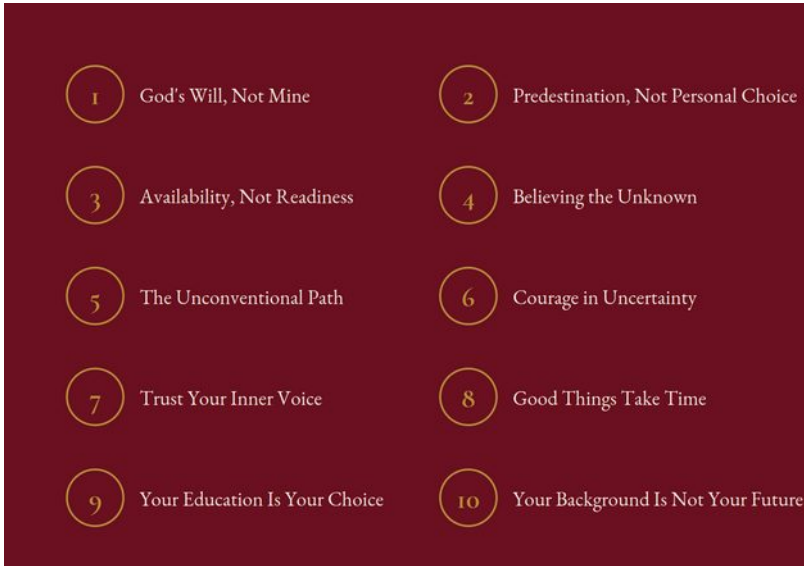
A mother's hand and a daughter's future. (Illustration reproduced from the first edition.)

Mary is honoured far beyond the Church. In Islam she holds a uniquely exalted place; she is the only woman named in the Qur'an, and a whole chapter (Surah 19) carries her name. Qur'an 3:42 presents the angels as telling Mary that God chose and purified her and chose her above the women of the worlds.

So here is my question. Out of all the beautiful girls in the world at that time, why Mary? What made *her* find favour in the sight of God? Why Mary and not Amaka? Or Aminat? Or Efosa's sister down the road?

Was there something hidden in Mary — some quality that God saw — that set her apart?

I believe there was. In fact, I believe there were at least ten. Let's walk through them together.



Ten insights from the life of Mary.

God's Will, Not Mine



Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

— Luke 1:38 (NKJV)

All goodness begins when we, as God's vessels, open our hands and submit to His will.

Think about Mary's situation. She was betrothed to a good man. In the language of today, she had found "the one." Joseph was hardworking, respected, God-fearing and fine. She had probably imagined the wedding a hundred times — the procession, the feast, the house Joseph would build for them with his own hands. God had blessed her with the man of her dreams.

And then God had a different plan, and it scattered all her expectations.

God's purpose for Mary was not only to marry her dream man. The reason He brought Mary and Joseph together went beyond social custom and beyond having children. God wanted Mary to carry His own Son. Mary could have insisted on her own way. She could have said, "Lord, please, just give me a simple wedding and a quiet life. No drama. No angels. No scandal."

But if we want to be vessels of good like Mary, our will must first line up with God's will — not just our own ideas and natural desires. This pattern runs through the whole Bible, from Abraham leaving his father's house to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

If you want to birth ideas that shape culture, you must align with God's will. Jesus Himself prayed, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup

away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). That kind of surrender can be painful, because God's will does not always match what we want. But it makes all the difference, because God is the custodian of all life. He sees the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10). If you want to do things that will outlive you — things that will shape generations — let God set your direction.

*Unto You I lift up my eyes, O You who dwell in the heavens.
Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their masters,
as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look
to the Lord our God, until He has mercy on us.*

— Psalm 123:1–2 (NKJV)

So the first matter of importance is this: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). Seek out God's purpose for your life. Even if it takes time, wait for it until you are sure that what you are pursuing is His purpose and not just your own will dressed up in church clothes.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- What plans have you made that you have never actually submitted to God?
- What would it look like for you to pray, "Not my will, but Yours," about your career, relationships or future this week?

Predestination, Not Personal Choice



Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.

— Jeremiah 1:5 (NKJV)

Some people believe that everything in life is already written by an invisible force. Others argue that we shape our destiny entirely by our own choices. The Bible holds both truths together: we are responsible for our choices, and yet God has purposes that were set before we were born.

In every generation, it seems, God raises certain people for a purpose He designed from the beginning. As you will see with every woman in Part II of this book, each of them was born "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14). Again and again there is a pattern of divine purpose, timing and opportunity that has little to do with the person's own cleverness. It was prearranged by the Custodian of the universe.

That is why you must believe that you, too, are not an accident. You are not a mistake, and you never will be. When the Designer of the universe was creating the world, He had you in mind. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). It doesn't matter what your background is, where you were born or how you were born. What matters is that before you were formed in the womb, God knew you and ordained you. He knows you the way He knew Mary, from the foundation of the world, and He has given you a real purpose to fulfil on the face of this earth.

Never forget this.

The Qur'an describes Mary in similar terms. It presents her as chosen and purified (3:42), as a woman of truth (5:75), and describes her son as a word from God (3:45). So the first and most reasonable explanation of why it was Mary and not Amaka is simply this: she was chosen. She was picked by divine election. Divine calling is not something another person can vote down or take away.

Dear woman reading this: you were also picked for a divine purpose. Before God formed you in the womb, He knew you. Before you were born, He set you apart. And there is nothing anybody can do about it.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- Do you tend to see yourself as an accident or as someone designed on purpose? Why?
- What gifts, burdens or passions might be clues to what God prepared you for?

Availability, Not Readiness



All the days of my hard service I will wait, till my change comes.

— Job 14:14 (NKJV)

We live in a world that worships readiness. We are told that "proper preparation prevents poor performance" and that "early to bed, early to rise" is the secret of success. There is wisdom in that. But when it comes to birthing real change, it is not readiness that leads. It is availability. The Nigerian speaker Olakunle Soriyan is often quoted as saying, "If you are ready, you are already late." The story of Mary proves the point.

Look at Mary. She was a young girl on the edge of womanhood — scholars guess somewhere between twelve and sixteen, just beginning to navigate the maze of puberty. She was a virgin. Her schooling, by our standards, was basic. She had none of the wisdom that comes with age and experience. She was not "ready."

But she was available.

Availability is a state of being: the presence of body, mind and spirit. Mary was available to her parents, to herself and, most of all, to God's plan. Now imagine if Mary had been caught up in teenage rebellion, in cheap sex for easy money, or in the struggles of an early pregnancy by the wrong man. Would she still have been chosen? God is merciful, and He has used broken people throughout history — but Mary's availability and purity of body and spirit made her a fitting vessel for this particular miracle.

They say your location determines your allocation. I would add that your *availability* determines what becomes available to you. Mary was available in every way that mattered. She was a homely girl, emotionally

present and spiritually alert. Her virginity was a sign of her consecration to God. By keeping herself, she showed she was ready to be a vessel for God's miraculous work. And her availability was not only about her body; it was about her heart being lined up with God's purpose.

I know what some of you are thinking: "Uncle Azuka, abeg, is it by force?" No, it is not by force. But hear me out.

Now picture destiny calling you — and finding you lost in cheap thrills, wasting your life in clubs, or thinking about selling your body because of poverty and suffering. Picture yourself sharing multiple partners just to keep up with what everyone else is doing. Could it be that God is dialling your number and hearing, "The number you are calling is currently switched off"? Or, "Your call is being diverted to another line"?

If Mary had not been available on the day the messenger came, she would have missed her place in the divine plan. So where will *you* be when destiny calls? Will you be available — or will you be too busy chasing clout on Instagram and TikTok, twerking for the whole world to see?

My sister, that was not Mary's way.

Be available. Stay available for your studies, for your parents, for the people around you and, above all, for God. In availability we find our true calling. That is the power of availability — the unseen force that shapes destiny.

Are you available? Destiny is waiting.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- What is currently "switching off your phone" when God might be calling?
- In which area of your life do you need to become more available — to God, to your family, or to your studies?

Believing the Unknown



Life is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it, without knowing what's going to happen next.

— Gilda Radner, *It's Always Something*

Tradition paints Mary as the kind of girl who, if you told her to carry a mountain on her head, would lift it first before asking how and why. It is like when a Nigerian soldier tells you to start running — for your own good, you had better start running first and ask questions later! Mary had that spirit: obedience before complaint. She did not doubt the messenger in white. She believed.

That simple act of belief is what is lacking in today's world. We question everything. That is not wrong in itself, but it creates a problem: if you wait until you know everything, you will never do anything. Many of the greatest achievements in history were stumbled into by people who took a step without seeing the whole staircase.

Consider Mother Teresa. She dedicated her life to serving the poorest of the poor without knowing where that path would lead. Her story is a powerful reminder that those who want to disrupt the status quo must be willing to walk into the unknown, even when the destination is unclear. When Mary said, "Let it be to me according to your word," she opened a door for every young girl who wants to do big things in this life.

Or consider the unlikely story of Hedy Lamarr. The world knew her as a glamorous Hollywood film star. Born in Vienna, Austria, in 1914, she escaped an oppressive marriage in Europe and made her way to America, where her beauty and acting talent captivated audiences. But behind the scenes she had a secret passion for science and invention.

During the Second World War, Lamarr teamed up with the composer George Antheil to design a system of "frequency hopping" to stop enemy forces from jamming the radio signals that guided torpedoes. They received a patent in 1942. At first the idea was ignored. Nobody took a movie star's invention seriously. But the principle behind it later became part of the spread-spectrum technology that helped make modern wireless communication — including Wi-Fi and Bluetooth — possible.

Lamarr's journey was not a straight line. She didn't set out to revolutionise technology. She simply followed her curiosity and a desire to help. Like Mother Teresa, she stepped into the unknown without knowing where it would lead, and in doing so she changed the world in a way few could have imagined.

Think about Mary, Mother Teresa and Hedy Lamarr. Each of these women, in her own way, changed the world. They were pioneers, driven by passion and a willingness to explore the uncharted territory of their own potential.

And you — yes, you — can do the same. Too much analysis leads to paralysis. (Some of us have been "planning" our business since we were in JSS 2. The business is now in SS 3 and still has not written its first exam.) Waiting for the "right time" can become a waste of time. And too much watching? It can turn you into a spectator for life.

So I urge you: go for it. Look beyond the stereotypes of what your gender can or cannot do. If God gives you an idea and you feel passionate enough about it, don't wait for perfect conditions. Take the plunge. You, too, can make a difference and shape culture. Who knows? Very soon, we might be telling your story. The world is full of stories, but the best ones are yet to be written.

Could the next one be yours?

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- What idea or calling have you been "over-analysing" instead of acting on?
- What is the smallest first step you could take this month?

Take the Unconventional Path



And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

— Romans 12:2 (NKJV)

Conformity is changing your behaviour to match the people around you. It is the chameleon's cloak — the quiet shift that helps you blend into the crowd. Whether it is agreeing with the majority, copying group habits, or behaving in a way everybody calls "normal," conformity means giving in to the pull of social pressure.

The Two Faces of Conformity

- **Informational influence.** Imagine standing at a crossroads, unsure of the way. You look around for clues. People who seem better informed become your compass, and you follow them. In a classroom, you might agree with the brilliant student simply because she is usually right.
- **Normative influence.** This one is driven by fear and desire. Fear of punishment pushes you to follow the rules, even when you disagree. Desire for acceptance and approval shapes your steps. You conform so you don't look foolish, or to win favour. It is the nod to group expectations, even when those expectations are as vague as morning mist.

Psychologists have studied this for nearly a century. In the early 1930s, the researcher Arthur Jenness asked people to guess how many beans were in a jar. First they guessed alone, then they discussed it as a group. When they

guessed alone again afterwards, their answers had moved closer to the group's. A few years later, Muzafer Sherif placed people in a dark room with a single dot of light, which appears to move even though it is still. Alone, their estimates of how far it moved varied widely. In a group, their answers quickly converged. The dot "danced" to the rhythm of the crowd.

The more we conform, the fiercer our competition becomes. Imagine a rich forest where every tree is a different species, each one showing the beauty of diversity. That is what the world is supposed to look like — full of individual paths and unique journeys. Unfortunately, our world is obsessed with sameness, and sameness breeds competition. When everybody wants the same thing, in the same way, at the same time, everybody fights.

But Mary stands as a beacon of individuality. She was not just a character in a story; she was a woman who dared to be different in her time, who accepted a divine calling that set her apart from everyone else. Her story is a testimony to the extraordinary power of being different.

We underestimate that power. We get so busy trying to fit in that we forget the strength in our uniqueness. Mary reminds young girls — and all of us — that our path may depart from the norm, and that it is often in those departures that our true strength lies.

Your journey may not look like anyone else's. Your uniqueness is one of your greatest assets.

A Tale of Two Eras

Today, Mary's story can be told as a tale of two eras.

In the first era is a young girl, wrapped in humility, carrying a secret: the Son of God growing in her womb. Her virginity was not an accident. It was part of her yes to God, her invitation to carry salvation.

In the second era is Amaka's generation — a world where young women wrestle with their identities, where bodies have become commodities and self-worth is measured in likes and filters. Every young girl wants to be a celebrity on IG or TikTok, because somehow we have been made to believe that our bodies are assets to be traded for likes and comments that might bring in some hard currency.

But that wasn't Mary. She defied convention. She did not choose purity to rebel or to look religious. She embraced it as part of God's grand design. Her purity was not merely the absence of physical intimacy; it was a consecration — an act of courage that went beyond her own desires. In a society where family line mattered enormously, Mary's womb carried the Divine. She dared to be different, not for applause, but for destiny.

Mary saw her body as a sacred temple, a dwelling place for God. She didn't treat herself as an object; she honoured her body. Her worth was not tied to anyone's approval. It flowed from her soul's alignment with God's purpose. Her virginity was not a burden; it was a mantle of honour. She didn't seek approval from the world; she sought favour from heaven — and she got it.

Where do *you* source your favour from? Instagram? TikTok? The next new app?

Today's Young Ladies: A Digital Dilemma

1. The selfie culture. In this era of pixels, resolution and screens, many young women are walking a digital road full of self-deceit. Their bodies — once temples — are being traded like commodities. Shapes that God designed to carry the next generation are now put on public display as "unique selling points." It is a selfie culture: *capture your worth in pixels*. Filter your imperfections, add a few moves that attract your "market," and collect the likes that validate your existence. What looks back from the mirror is no longer a soul but a curated persona. And the question keeps echoing: *Am I enough?*

2. The objectification trap. Many young women today struggle with self-objectification. Through their phones they have swallowed a toxic cocktail of media, peer pressure and social norms. Some of their male counterparts reduce them to body parts — the curve of the hips, the lips, the size of the breasts, the size of the backside ("yansh") — as if that is all that matters. So many girls are no longer comfortable in their own bodies. They are chasing enhancements and modifications of body and skin, and modern science and technology are making it all possible. Worth is measured in double taps, not in depth of soul. Things fall apart; the sacred temple crumbles; the body becomes a billboard. The sacred "yes" to God turns into a desperate plea for validation.

Virginity Is Not a Burden

But Mary's legacy whispers: *You are more than pixels.*

Young woman, you, like Mary, can reclaim your worth. Your body is not a tool; it is a canvas for purpose. Virginity is not a burden; it is a choice to honour what is sacred. Imagine a different kind of selfie — one that captures the soul. The filter? Grace. The likes? Inner peace. The validation? God's whisper: "I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14).

And if you have already made choices you regret, hear me clearly: Mary's God is also the God of second chances. Purity is not only a status; it is a direction. You can start walking in it today.

Young ladies, dare to be different. Embrace your sacred yes. Your body — the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19) — deserves reverence, not objectification. Activate the Mary within you, and live.

As you walk your path, remember: it is not about conforming to the world's expectations but about embracing the journey God has given you. Your uniqueness is one of your greatest assets, and your path can lead to extraordinary places.

So go ahead. Embrace your unique path. The world is waiting to hear your story.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- Where do you feel the strongest pressure to conform — at school, online, in church, among friends?
- How much of your sense of worth is tied to likes, comments or other people's opinions?
- What would it look like to treat your body as a temple this week?

Embrace Courage in the Face of Uncertainty



Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

— Joshua 1:9 (NKJV)

Courage is not something you already have that makes you brave when hard times come. It is not a pre-existing condition, and you cannot buy it in the market like tomatoes. Courage is what you earn when you have walked through the hard times and discovered that God was with you in them. It is the reward at the end of a difficult road — proof of your resilience.

Mary's story shows this perfectly. Picture her: an ordinary, homely girl living with her parents, suddenly facing an extraordinary moment. The angel Gabriel appears with the hottest gist in history — "You will conceive by the Holy Spirit." Fear grips her heart. Trembling shows in her eyes. And yet, inside that trembling, a seed of courage begins to grow.

Bravery was not the absence of fear. It was the choice to say yes while trembling. Mary's resolve was stronger than her shaking knees. She surrendered — not to fate, but to purpose. When she asked, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?", all she needed was reassurance. And once she had it, she did not look back.

Think about what that yes cost her. An unmarried girl who turned up pregnant in a small village faced shame, gossip and even danger. Matthew tells us that Joseph, being a just man, "was minded to put her away secretly" (Matthew 1:19) — in other words, to quietly call off the marriage.

Even the man she loved did not believe her story at first, until an angel spoke to him in a dream. At a moment when nobody believed her, Mary kept whispering the same words: *Let it be to me according to Your word.*

Her fear turned into resolve. That is the point: bravery is not never feeling scared. It is feeling the fear and obeying anyway.

Mary showed courage and resilience in the face of adversity. She carried the stigma of an unexplained pregnancy. But she stayed faithful to God. She did not let social norms dictate her actions; she listened to her faith and her conviction. The path was not easy. It was full of difficulties. But she did not waver. She did not let the whispers of doubt cloud her judgement. She stood firm, her faith unshaken and her courage undiminished.

And she was not the only one.

Dora: The Counterfeit Crusader

In the sun-drenched heart of Nigeria, a girl named Dora was born in Makurdi in 1954. Like Mary, her story weaves courage into the fabric of time.

Dora Akunyili became a pharmacist and a lecturer in pharmacology. Then tragedy struck her family. In 1988 her younger sister Vivian, who was diabetic, died after being treated with fake insulin. Dora's grief lit a fire. Fear did not disappear; it fuelled her. In 2001 she became Director-General of NAFDAC, the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control, and she declared war on counterfeit drugs.

She assembled an army — many of them women pharmacists and inspectors. They raided open-air drug markets, burned mountains of fake medicine, and shut down the businesses of powerful criminals. The threats came quickly. In December 2003, gunmen attacked her convoy; a bullet pierced her headscarf and grazed her head. She survived, and she kept going. Bravery was not immunity to fear. It was her refusal to let

anyone else's family suffer what hers had suffered, even at the risk of her own life.

Mary and Dora — separated by two thousand years, but united by courage. Their trembling hearts gave birth to legacies. So, to every girl reading this: fear will visit you. It is a guest at every banquet of life. Bravery is not fear's absence; it is the defiant dance you do in its presence. Say yes while trembling. Give birth to purpose. Protect lives. Be a Mary. Be a Dora.

Today's young women face choices that may seem less dramatic, but they are no less important. And yet many hesitate. Fear whispers, "What if?" And the courage gap widens.

*In uncertainty lies the canvas upon which
courage paints its masterpiece.*

That sentence sums up the journeys of Mary and Dora. The uncertainty they faced became the canvas for their courage — and what a masterpiece they painted! Often, it is the trials we face that reveal our true courage.

So as we navigate our own uncertainties, let's remember Mary and Dora: their courage, their resilience and their unshakeable faith. And let's paint our own masterpieces on the canvas of our lives, as women who give birth to good.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- What is the "What if?" that fear keeps whispering to you?
- Who in your life needs you to be brave on their behalf?

Trust Your Instincts and Your Inner Voice



But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.

— Luke 2:19 (NKJV)

Mary's journey shows the power of listening to the voice God places within. It speaks to us not because it is mystical, but because it is deeply wise. Here was a young woman who, faced with an angel's message, chose to follow the compass of her heart rather than the noise of the world around her.

Listen to her when she arrived at the home of her cousin Elizabeth. As soon as Elizabeth heard her greeting, the baby leaped in Elizabeth's womb, and she cried out, "Blessed are you among women!" (Luke 1:41–42). And then Mary opened her mouth and poured out her soul:

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty. He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.

— Luke 1:46–55 (NKJV)

A village girl sang that. She knew her Scriptures. She knew her God. And she knew — deep inside, before anyone else confirmed it — that she was part of something that would turn the world upside down: the proud scattered, the mighty brought down, the lowly lifted up.

This is not a tale of blind faith. It is a story of trust rooted in knowing God. Mary's story teaches young girls to recognise the wisdom God has placed within them, and to walk their own path rather than just following whatever trend society sets.

Young women, listen. Your instincts and your inner voice matter. When popular culture pulls one way, dare to go another. Trust the quiet whisper that defies convention, especially when it agrees with God's Word. Like Mary, give birth to purpose. Protect your dreams. Triumph over fear. The courage gap can close — one bold choice at a time.

In a noisy, chaotic world, it is easy to lose sight of our inner compass. We are bombarded with information, opinions and expectations. But Mary reminds us to pause, to ponder, and to trust.

Your intuition is more than a feeling. It is built from your experiences, your knowledge and your understanding of the world — your mind making connections faster than you can consciously follow. For a believer, it is also sharpened by prayer and by the Word of God. So the next time you face a decision, take a moment. Switch off the noise. Listen to that inner voice, test it against Scripture, and trust it. Like Mary, you may find it leads you down the very path you were meant to walk.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- When was the last time you switched off every screen and simply listened?
- Is there a decision in front of you right now where you need to trust what God has already shown you?

Good Things Take Time



To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.

— Ecclesiastes 3:1 (NKJV)

Just as a seed takes time to germinate and grow, so goodness takes time to cultivate. This truth is beautifully shown in the life of Mary, the mother of Good.

Mary's journey was not one of instant gratification. Nine months of pregnancy under the cloud of village gossip. A tiring journey to Bethlehem. A birth in a place meant for animals. A flight to Egypt as a refugee. Thirty quiet years in Nazareth, watching her son grow — and, like every mother, probably reminding Him to sweep the carpentry shop. And then, finally, the day she stood at a wedding in Cana and told the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it" (John 2:5). From her humble beginnings to her place in history, every step of Mary's journey was a lesson in patience and perseverance.

Think of a seed being planted. It starts as a tiny, seemingly insignificant speck. Yet with time, the right conditions and a healthy dose of patience, that seed can grow into a mighty tree. That is the nature of goodness. It cannot be rushed or forced. It has to be nurtured, cared for and given time to grow.

Now let's turn to another figure in history who embodies this principle: Nelson Mandela. Mandela's journey was one of immense struggle. He spent twenty-seven years in prison for fighting against the injustice of apartheid in South Africa. Yet, through all those years, he never lost sight of his goal. He understood that the road to freedom and equality was long, and he was willing to endure whatever it took. In 1990

he walked out of prison, and in 1994 he became the first democratically elected president of South Africa.

So if you want to achieve good like Mary or Mandela, remember this: good things take time. They require patience, perseverance and a steady belief in the power of goodness. Plant your seeds of goodness, nurture them with care, and in time they will grow into a forest of change. Every act of goodness, no matter how small, is a step towards a better world. Keep planting. Keep nurturing. Keep believing.

In the end, good things take time.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- Where are you most tempted to take a shortcut right now?
- What "seed" can you plant today that may only bear fruit in ten years?

Your Education Is Your Choice



The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

— Proverbs 9:10 (NKJV)

Christian tradition remembers Mary as no ordinary child. The *Protoevangelium of James* pictures her as bright and devout, growing in grace in the Temple courts. Whatever we make of those stories, Luke's Gospel gives us real evidence: the young woman who sang the Magnificat knew the Scriptures deeply. Her song echoes the prayer of Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1–10) and the Psalms line after line. But it was not only her knowledge that set her apart. It was her devotion, her humility and her obedience. Those virtues, together with a special grace, distinguished her from her peers.

Now let's think about education itself. The Nigerian thinker Olakunle Soriyan has long argued that education and schooling are not the same thing. Education, in its truest sense, is not confined to the four walls of a classroom. It is not a one-size-fits-all curriculum designed for mass consumption. Education is a deeply personal journey of self-discovery.

*Schooling is what you are taught.
Education is what you teach yourself.*

Education is the human spirit rising above its limits, unleashing its God-given creativity and carving its own path. It is gaining wisdom through life experience, pursuing growth relentlessly, and becoming, under God, an

architect of your own destiny. It is about shaping a world that reflects your unique purpose and contribution.

In Mary's story we see a vivid picture of this. Her education was not limited to formal religious instruction. It was a holistic formation that prepared her for her calling. Her curiosity, her spiritual depth and her moral integrity were the fruits of a heart that kept learning. They equipped her for her divine assignment.

In 1925, a young African American woman named Maryrose Reeves Allen arrived at Howard University in Washington, D.C., to lead its new Department of Physical Education for Women. Born in Louisville, Kentucky, she had trained at the Sargent School of Physical Education in Boston and would later earn a master's degree from Boston University. At a time when Black women were rarely given authority in American universities, she built the department from the ground up and led it for decades. Her vision went far beyond exercise classes. She taught that body, mind and spirit belonged together, and she gave the department a bold motto: "The Negro Woman as our Standard." In other words, *we will not measure ourselves by anyone else's yardstick*.

That is what it means to own your education. Nobody handed Maryrose Allen a map. She drew one.

So as we navigate the journey of life, let us remember that our education is indeed our choice. Let us strive to be like Mary: to learn with passion, to live with purpose, and to leave a legacy of light. Read. Ask questions. Learn a skill. Take the free course. Sit with older women who know things you don't. Your certificate may open a door, but your education will decide what you do once you walk through it.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- What are you teaching yourself right now, outside of school or work?
- What skill or subject would make you more useful to your family, your church or your community?

Your Background Does Not Determine Your Future



Can anything good come out of Nazareth?

— John 1:46 (NKJV)

Mary and Joseph lived in first-century Galilee, a land full of political and economic turmoil. The region was part of the Roman Empire. Roman rule meant heavy taxes and tribute, on top of the taxes owed to local rulers and the Temple, and that made life hard for ordinary people.

Mary was not from a wealthy or well-connected family. The Gospels show us a life of modest means. When she and Joseph presented baby Jesus at the Temple, they offered "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons" (Luke 2:24). The Law of Moses allowed that cheaper offering for families who could not afford a lamb (Leviticus 12:8). In other words, the mother of the Saviour of the world brought the offering of the poor.

Most people in Galilee were peasants and labourers living off the land — farmers, shepherds and fishermen. Roman occupation squeezed the economy, and poverty was widespread. Women faced an especially hard existence. They had few opportunities for education or paid work and were bound by strict social and cultural expectations.

The circumstances of Jesus' birth were not a reflection of Mary's character or status, but of the practical realities of the time. Mary and Joseph travelled to Bethlehem, probably on foot, perhaps with a donkey. With the town crowded, there was no proper room for them, and the baby was laid in a manger — an animal's feeding trough (Luke 2:7). Yet a manger did not reduce the significance of His birth or the importance of

Mary's role as His mother. In fact, the humble circumstances of Jesus' birth are part of His message of love and redemption.

Jesus Himself later said, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Matthew 8:20). Humility and simplicity ran through His whole life and teaching. So while the circumstances of His birth were humble, they take nothing away from the importance of Mary's role in the story of salvation.

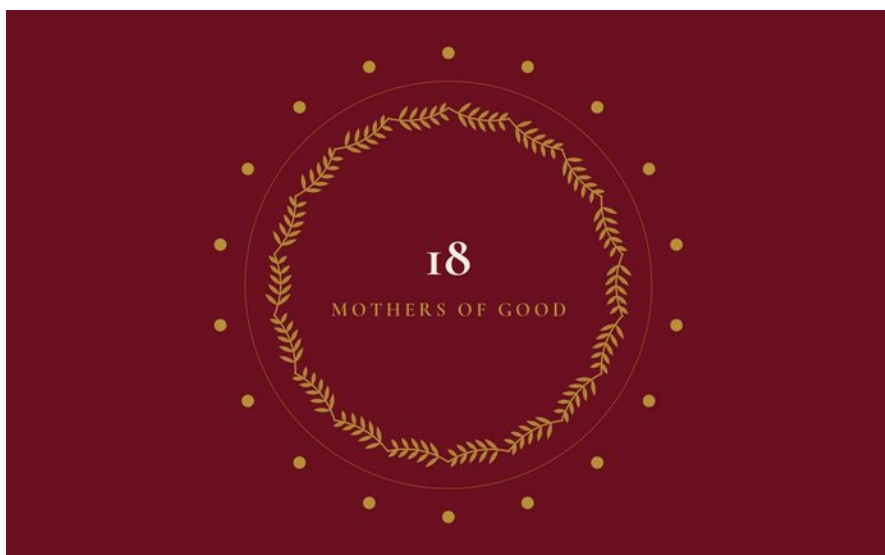
The religious and political atmosphere was tense, too. Galilee and Judea were home to Jews of many different parties and to Gentile neighbours who worshipped other gods. Tensions between Jewish communities and their Roman rulers sometimes boiled over into violence and rebellion. Mary and Joseph belonged to an ordinary Jewish family in a small village, living under an empire that did not know or care that they existed.

The story of Mary and Joseph is a testimony to the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity. It reminds us that your background does not have to determine your future, and that even from the humblest beginnings, greatness can emerge. This lesson still speaks today — especially to women who find themselves in similar circumstances. It is a call to rise above social limitations and to understand that your worth is not measured by your bank account or your family name, but by the value God has placed in you.

Mary's story is a beacon of hope. Humble beginnings do not disqualify anyone from shaping history. As you will see in Part II — and especially in the very last chapter of this book — a village girl with no inheritance can still build something that feeds generations.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- What part of your background have you been using as an excuse?
- Who do you know who rose from very little? What can you learn from them?



PART TWO

Mothers of Good



The Company of Mary



Throughout history, many women have lived the kind of life Mary lived. Not all of them were Christians. Not all of them were perfect. Some were queens; some could barely afford school fees. But each of them, at some decisive moment, refused to let the culture around her decide how far she could go.

That is what I mean by a *Mother of Good*. A Mother of Good is not only a woman who has given birth. She is a woman who gives birth to good — to courage, justice, learning, healing, faith and freedom — and then nurtures it until it can stand on its own.

In the pages that follow you will meet eighteen of them. Each chapter tells one woman's story and draws out the lessons it holds for us. Read them slowly. Notice the common thread: an ordinary beginning, a moment of decision, a price paid, and a legacy that outlived the woman who carried it.

-
- c. 1200 BC ● **Deborah**
Prophetess and judge of Israel
 - c. 5 BC ● **Mary of Nazareth**
Mother of Jesus
 - c. 1500s ● **Queen Idia**
First Iyoba of Benin
 - c. 1797 ● **Sojourner Truth**
Abolitionist and preacher
 - c. 1822 ● **Harriet Tubman**
Conductor of freedom
 - 1848 ● **Mary Slessor**
Missionary in Calabar
 - 1900 ● **Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti**
Leader of the Abeokuta women
 - 1910 ● **Mother Teresa**
Servant of the poorest
 - 1928 ● **Maya Angelou**
Poet and memoirist
 - 1932 ● **Miriam Makeba**
Mama Africa
 - 1938 ● **Ellen Johnson Sirleaf**
First elected woman president in Africa
 - 1940 ● **Wangari Maathai**
Tree-planter, Nobel laureate
 - 1954 ● **Oprah Winfrey**
Broadcaster and philanthropist
 - 1954 ● **Dora Akunyili**
Crusader against fake drugs
 - 1954 ● **Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala**
First woman to lead the WTO
 - 1958 ● **Janet I. Orumgbe**
The timber woman of Edo
 - 1959 ● **Winnie Byanyima**
Engineer, freedom fighter, UN leader
 - Today ● **Amanda Obidike**
Champion of girls in STEM
 - Today ● **Deborah C. Nnamani**
A daughter of light

Mothers of Good across three thousand years.

The Hall of Honour



Before we begin, meet them all at once. Eighteen women. Different centuries, different languages, different hairstyles — and one thing in common: each of them said yes to a calling bigger than her culture expected. Take a good look. By the end of this book, you will know every one of them by name.

THE HALL OF HONOUR



The Mothers of Good, in the order you will meet them.

C H A P T E R 1

Mother Teresa

The Mother of Compassion



Mother Teresa (1910–1997)

*My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in
deed and in truth.*

— 1 John 3:18 (NKJV)

On 26 August 1910, in the city of Skopje — then part of the Ottoman Empire, today the capital of North Macedonia — a baby girl was born to an Albanian family and named Anjezë Gonxhe Bojaxhiu. Nobody knew

that this little girl would become Mother Teresa, a beacon of love and hope for millions.

At eighteen, Anjezë felt a clear call from God. She left home to join the Sisters of Loreto, an Irish community of nuns with missions in India. After a short training period in Ireland she sailed to India, took her first vows, and chose the name Teresa.

For nearly two decades she taught at St Mary's School in Calcutta (now Kolkata). But outside the convent walls she saw poverty and suffering that broke her heart. In 1946, on a train journey to Darjeeling, she experienced what she called "the call within the call": to leave the convent and serve Christ among the poorest of the poor. In 1948 she received permission to go. She put on a simple white sari with a blue border, walked into the slums of Calcutta with no money, and started an open-air school for children under a tree. Her only capital was her faith in God's providence.

In 1950 the Church approved her new order, the Missionaries of Charity. Their mission was to love and care for those nobody else would look after: the dying on the streets, lepers, orphans, the abandoned. From one woman in a slum, the order spread to more than a hundred countries across Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas.

Mother Teresa's work was recognised around the world, and in 1979 she received the Nobel Peace Prize. Characteristically, she asked that the money usually spent on the celebration banquet be given to the poor. She died in Calcutta on 5 September 1997 and was declared a saint by the Catholic Church on 4 September 2016.

Her life proves that one person's unwavering dedication can light a beacon of hope in the darkest corners of the world. It echoes Mary's life, calling young women to rethink their lives and become architects of change, shaping culture through compassion and resilience.

Lessons from Mother Teresa's Life

1. **Follow your calling.** She heard God's call young and followed it — twice. Sometimes the second call is the one that defines your life.
2. **Compassion for all.** Her devotion to the poorest of the poor teaches us to see dignity in everyone, whatever their status.
3. **Faith in God's provision.** With no funds, she started a school under a tree. Faith and determination can overcome what money cannot.
4. **Small beginnings, global impact.** One woman in one slum became a movement in over a hundred nations. Never despise the day of small things (Zechariah 4:10).
5. **Legacy.** Long after her death, her life still teaches us that our deeds can outlive us.

Mary's Thread

Like Mary, Mother Teresa said yes to God without knowing where the road would lead. So let's strive to be a little more like Mother Teresa and Mary, spreading love and hope wherever we go.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- Who are the "poorest of the poor" in your own street, school or city?
- What small thing could you do this week with great love?

C H A P T E R 2

Miriam Makeba

A Voice for Africa's Struggles



Miriam Makeba, "Mama Africa" (1932–2008)

He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly.

— Luke 1:52 (NKJV)

In Prospect Township, Johannesburg, on 4 March 1932, a baby girl was born whose name was Zenzile Miriam Makeba. The world would come to know her as *Mama Africa*. Her life was a song of resilience, activism and artistry — a melody that crossed borders and broke down barriers.

Her mother was arrested for brewing beer illegally when Miriam was just weeks old, and baby Miriam spent her first months in prison with her. It was a hard start. But music was in her from the beginning. She sang in the choir at the Kilnerton Training Institute in Pretoria, and as a young woman she joined the popular Manhattan Brothers, and later formed her own all-woman group, the Skylarks, blending South African melodies with American jazz and swing.

Her big break came through Alf Herbert's *African Jazz and Variety* show, and then through the American filmmaker Lionel Rogosin, who featured her in his documentary *Come Back, Africa* (1959), a powerful exposé of life under apartheid. When the film premiered at the Venice Film Festival, Miriam went with it — and the world met her voice.

In London she met Harry Belafonte, who became her mentor and friend. America welcomed her; she released her first solo album in 1960, and songs like "Pata Pata" and "The Click Song" became international hits. In 1966 she and Belafonte won a Grammy Award for their album *An Evening with Belafonte/Makeba*, making her one of the first Africans to win one.

But when her mother died in 1960 and Miriam tried to return home for the funeral, the apartheid government cancelled her passport. She would spend thirty years in exile. She used that exile as a platform. In 1963 she testified before the United Nations Special Committee against Apartheid, calling for an end to the system that had banished her. Her marriage in 1968 to the American civil rights activist Stokely Carmichael cost her record contracts and tours in the United States, so the couple moved to Guinea in West Africa, where she continued to sing and campaign. Only in 1990, after Nelson Mandela's release, did she finally return to South Africa.

She survived cancer, the loss of her only daughter, and years of political hostility. She died in 2008, doing what she had always done: singing, at a concert in Italy.

Lessons from Miriam Makeba's Legacy

1. **Courage in the face of challenge.** Exile, persecution and personal loss did not silence her. Courage is not only facing fear but acting in spite of it.
2. **Art as activism.** Her music educated the world about Africa's struggle for freedom. Your gift — voice, pen, camera, keyboard — can carry truth too.
3. **Resilience amid hardship.** Illness, politics and rejection could not stop her. Setbacks can become stepping stones.
4. **A global sisterhood.** She sang for women and for Africa on every continent. Our struggles and hopes as women are connected.
5. **A legacy that outlives you.** Through her foundation and the Makeba Centre for Girls near Johannesburg, her name still protects and lifts young women.

Mary's Thread

Mary sang the Magnificat, a song about the proud being scattered and the lowly lifted up. Miriam Makeba spent her life singing that same song to a world that needed to hear it.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- What gift do you have that could become a voice for someone else?
- Is there a place where you have been "exiled" — shut out or rejected? How could that become a platform?

Sojourner Truth

A Quilt of Resilience and Freedom



Sojourner Truth (c. 1797–1883)

*Learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the
fatherless, plead for the widow.*

— Isaiah 1:17 (NKJV)

Let me tell you about a woman whose name rings like a hymn in the hearts of those who seek justice. Her name? **Sojourner Truth**. A name that carries the weight of centuries — *sojourner*, a traveller; *truth*, the message she carried.

She was born around 1797 as Isabella Baumfree in Swartekill, Ulster County, New York. She was not cradled by privilege but by the rough hands of slavery. She grew up speaking Dutch, was sold several times as a child, and suffered beatings and hard labour. Her parents' lullabies were whispered lessons in survival.

The Power of Resilience

Isabella's spirit was forged in the fire of hardship. She wore the chains of servitude, yet her heart soared like a bird against a cage. Resilience, for her, was not merely surviving; it was daring to dream beyond the horizon of oppression. In 1826, after her enslaver broke his promise to free her, she walked away — carrying her infant daughter in her arms. "I did not run off," she said later, "for I thought that wicked, but I walked off, believing that to be all right."

The Dance of Justice

Soon afterwards she learned that her five-year-old son, Peter, had been illegally sold to a slaveholder in Alabama. Most people in her position would have given up. Isabella went to court. With help from Quaker friends, she sued — and won. She became one of the first Black women in America to take a white man to court and win. She brought her son home.

The Language of Freedom

In 1843, after a deep spiritual experience, she changed her name to Sojourner Truth and set out to travel and preach. Her voice was her sword. She spoke not in whispers but in thunderclaps — in streets, barns, fields and camp meetings. She could not read or write, but she could hold a crowd spellbound. She once said she did not read books; she read people — and the people could not look away. In 1850 she dictated her life story to Olive Gilbert, and *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth* was published.

She joined the fight against slavery and for women's rights. At a women's rights convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1851, she gave the speech that people now remember as "Ain't I a Woman?" — a powerful reminder that Black women were women too, and deserved the same dignity and rights. In 1864 she met President Abraham Lincoln at the White House. During the Civil War she helped recruit Black soldiers, and afterwards she worked to help freed people find land and work.

Sojourner Truth died in 1883 in Battle Creek, Michigan. She was not merely a woman; she was a revelation. Her story whispers across time: *You, too, can be a seeker of truth. You, too, can dance with justice. You, too, can wield words like a sword.*

Lessons from Sojourner Truth's Life

1. **Resilience is more than survival.** She dreamed beyond her chains.
2. **Justice is worth fighting for.** She went to court for her son, and won.
3. **Your voice is a weapon.** She could not read, but she could speak truth.
4. **Rename yourself by God's purpose.** Isabella became Sojourner Truth. Your past does not have the final word on your identity.
5. **Your story is a legacy.** She dictated her narrative so that others could learn from it.

Mary's Thread

Mary called herself the "maidservant of the Lord." Sojourner Truth, born a servant of men, chose to become a servant of God and of truth instead. When the world binds you, remember her resilience. When silence threatens, speak truth like a hymn.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- What name or label has the world given you that God wants to change?
- Where do you need to speak up for someone who cannot speak for themselves?

Deborah

A Tapestry of Wisdom and Valour



Deborah, prophetess and judge of Israel. An artist's imagining; no likeness survives.

*Village life ceased, it ceased in Israel, until I, Deborah, arose,
arose a mother in Israel.*

— Judges 5:7 (NKJV)

In the ancient land of Israel, more than three thousand years ago, there lived a woman named Deborah. Her story is told in the Bible in Judges chapters 4 and 5, and it still calls to young hearts seeking purpose and courage.

The Prophetess and Judge

Deborah was more than a name in history; she was a living paradox in her culture. She was a prophetess — a woman through whom God's words flowed. And she was also a judge — a leader who settled disputes and led the nation. "She would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim. And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment" (Judges 4:5). When darkness covered the land, Deborah stepped into the light.

Fear Unravelling

Israel was being cruelly oppressed by Jabin, a Canaanite king, and his army commander Sisera, who had nine hundred iron chariots. God gave Deborah a message for a man named Barak: gather an army and go to battle. But Barak trembled. "If you will go with me, then I will go," he said, "but if you will not go with me, I will not go!" (Judges 4:8). Deborah did not hesitate. "I will surely go with you," she replied — and she also told him that the honour of the victory would go to a woman.

She led. Israel won. And the final blow against Sisera was struck by another woman, Jael.

The Songstress of Victory

After the battle, Deborah and Barak sang a song of triumph that is preserved in Judges 5 — one of the oldest poems in the Bible. In it Deborah calls herself "a mother in Israel." She did not see leadership and motherhood as opposites. She mothered a whole nation back to courage.

The Bee and the Sweet Sting

Deborah's name in Hebrew means "bee." Like a bee, she was industrious and led her people towards the sweetness of justice. And like a bee, she had a sting: the sting of truth. God's Word is sharp, and it pricks those who

stray. But inside the sting there is honey — the sweetness of obedience. Young ones, remember this: your words can sting or heal. Choose wisely.

The Thread of Forgiveness

The book of Judges tells a repeated story: Israel strays, suffers, cries out to God, and God raises a deliverer. Deborah's victory brought forty years of peace (Judges 5:31). God's grace stitches brokenness into beauty. Your past does not have to define you. Forgive yourself, receive God's forgiveness, and let your life sing a new song.

Lessons from the Loom

1. **God's blueprint.** Deborah's life defied the stereotypes of her day. God's design for you may go beyond what your society expects of women.
2. **Wisdom weaves courage.** People came to her because she was wise. Seek knowledge, read, learn, and let wisdom grow courage in you.
3. **Speak, sing and lead.** Your words matter. Your song matters. Your leadership matters.
4. **Fear is a shadow; faith is the light.** When fear knocks, let faith answer. Barak borrowed courage from Deborah; someone may need to borrow yours.
5. **Forgiveness mends the tapestry.** Forgive others, forgive yourself, and let grace mend the fabric of your life.

Mary's Thread

Deborah called herself "a mother in Israel." Mary became the mother of Israel's Messiah. Both women show that God's call on a woman's life can be as big as a nation.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- Who might need to "borrow" your courage right now?
- Do your words usually sting or heal? What would you like people to say about your words?

Queen Idia of Benin

The Mother Who Went to War



Queen Idia, first Iyoba of Benin (late 15th – early 16th century). Artist's impression; no photograph or life portrait exists.

Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies.

— Proverbs 31:10 (NKJV)

If you have ever held a Nigerian festival brochure, looked at the logo of FESTAC '77, or walked past a souvenir stall on Airport Road in Benin City, you have seen her face: a serene woman carved in ivory, her eyes

calm, her forehead marked, her hair crowned with tiny carved heads. That face belongs to Idia, mother of Oba Esigie of Benin, and one of the most remarkable women in the history of Africa.

Here is the funny thing. Millions of Nigerians have worn her face on T-shirts, tote bags and Ankara prints without knowing her story. Some think she is just "that beautiful mask." Let me introduce you properly — because once you know her, you will never look at that mask the same way again.

A Kingdom at Its Height

Idia lived in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, when the Benin Kingdom was one of the great powers of West Africa. This was a kingdom of guild craftsmen who cast bronze and carved ivory, of broad streets and great earthworks — the famous Benin walls and moats, which some historians describe as among the largest earthworks ever built by human hands. When Portuguese visitors arrived in the late 1400s, they were impressed by the city's order and organisation.

Benin oral tradition remembers Idia as a young woman from the Benin countryside — tradition often places her origins in the Ugieghudu area — who became a wife of Oba Ozolua, "the Conqueror." Tradition also remembers her as a woman of unusual intelligence, with deep knowledge of herbs, medicine and the spiritual world. Her son, Esigie, became Oba around 1504.

HISTORY AND TRADITION

Much of what we know about Idia comes from Benin oral tradition, preserved by the palace, chiefs and court historians for five centuries. Dates are approximate, and different tellers add different details. What is not in doubt is her importance: the office she founded, the art made in her honour, and the place she holds in Benin memory.

The Crisis

Esigie's reign did not begin with a coronation party and small chops. It began with a fight. His brother Arhwaran, based at Udo, challenged his right to the throne, and the rivalry turned into war. Then, while Benin was still unsettled, the powerful kingdom of Igala, ruled from Idah, came down from the north and threatened Benin's territory — around 1515–1516.

This was the moment that defined Idia. Tradition says she did not sit in the palace wringing her hands and waiting for news. She used everything she had — counsel, spiritual authority, her knowledge of medicine and her influence with the chiefs — to stand behind her son. Popular tradition goes further, remembering her raising soldiers and standing with the army in the field. Benin won the war with Igala, and Esigie's throne was secured.

Whatever later retellings add, the historical memory is clear on one point: Idia was not a silent figure at the edge of power. Her influence decided the fate of a kingdom.

The *Iyoba*

In gratitude, Oba Esigie did something that had never been done before. He created the title of *Iyoba* — Queen Mother — and gave Idia her own palace, her own court and her own chiefs at Urelu, outside the old city centre. From that day, the mother of every Oba would hold that title. Idia's courage was written into the constitution of the kingdom.

Think about that for a moment. Five hundred years ago, in a world where women were routinely shut out of power, a woman's wisdom and bravery created a permanent seat for women at the table of government. That is what culture shapers do: they don't just win a battle; they change the rules for everyone who comes after them.

The Mask That Travelled the World

The royal guild of ivory carvers honoured Idia with pendant masks, worn by the Oba at ceremonies. In 1897, British soldiers invaded and looted Benin City, carrying away thousands of bronzes and ivories — including the Idia masks. The most famous is now in the British Museum in London; others are in museums in New York, Stuttgart and elsewhere.

In 1977, when Nigeria hosted FESTAC '77 — the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture — Idia's face became the festival's emblem. Nigeria asked for the original mask to be returned for the festival. The request was refused, so Nigerian artists carved a replica. The woman whose image had been taken away became the symbol of a proud, independent Africa. Today, as museums around the world debate returning the Benin treasures, Idia's face is once again in the news.

Lessons from Queen Idia's Life

1. **Step up in the crisis.** When her son and her nation were threatened, she did not wait to be invited. Leadership often begins with refusing to watch from the sidelines.
2. **Wisdom is a weapon.** Idia is remembered not only for courage but for counsel, medicine and knowledge. The strongest leaders combine bravery with clear thinking.
3. **Stand behind the people you love.** Idia's greatness was bound up with her son's. Sometimes your calling is to make someone else's calling possible — and that is not a small thing.
4. **Create space for the women after you.** Because of Idia, the office of Iyoba existed for every queen mother who followed. Your breakthrough can become someone else's starting line.
5. **Your culture has heroines too.** You don't have to look abroad for role models. Some of the greatest are carved into your own history — sometimes literally.

6. **What is taken can come home.** Her masks were carried away, but her story came home, and today it is on the lips of a new generation.

Mary's Thread

Mary stood beside her Son from the manger to the cross. Idia stood beside hers on the battlefield. Both show us that a mother's strength can shape the destiny of a nation.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- What women in your own family or community history deserve to be remembered?
- What crisis around you is waiting for someone to step up?
- Whose calling could you help make possible?

CHAPTER 6

Maya Angelou

A Beacon of Hope and Resilience



Maya Angelou (1928–2014)

For a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again.

— Proverbs 24:16 (NKJV)

Maya Angelou was born Marguerite Annie Johnson on 4 April 1928, in St Louis, Missouri. She became one of America's most beloved poets, memoirists and civil rights activists. Her life is a testimony to the resilience of the human spirit.

The Silence

Her childhood was full of pain. Her parents separated when she was three, and she and her brother Bailey were sent to live with their grandmother in the small town of Stamps, Arkansas, in the segregated American South. When she was about eight, she was sexually abused by a man her mother knew. After she told her family, the man was killed, and little Marguerite believed her words had caused his death. She stopped speaking. For nearly five years, she was almost completely silent.

A teacher named Mrs Bertha Flowers helped her find her way back. She gave the silent girl books and poetry and told her that words mean more when they are spoken aloud. Maya read everything — Shakespeare, Dickens, Black poets like Paul Laurence Dunbar and Langston Hughes. Slowly, her voice returned.

The Struggle

As a young woman, she faced poverty and hard choices. At sixteen she became a mother. She was determined, and when she wanted a job on the San Francisco streetcars, she sat in the office day after day until they hired her — making her the first Black woman streetcar conductor in the city. Over the years she worked as a cook, a dancer, a singer and a journalist, and she lived in Egypt and Ghana, where she worked alongside other African Americans who had moved to Africa after independence. She knew Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, and worked for both.

The Voice

In 1969 she published *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, the story of her childhood. It became a classic. She went on to write seven autobiographies, several books of essays and poetry, plays, films and television programmes over more than fifty years. In 1993 she read her poem "On the Pulse of Morning" at the inauguration of President Bill Clinton. In 2011 she received the Presidential Medal of Freedom,

America's highest civilian honour. When Nelson Mandela died in 2013, she wrote the tribute poem "His Day Is Done." She received more than fifty honorary degrees — this woman who once could not speak.

Lessons from Maya Angelou's Life

1. **Resilience in the face of adversity.** Abuse, poverty and racism could not stop her. No matter what you face, God has placed strength within you to rise.
2. **The power of your voice.** She went from silence to speaking to presidents. Your voice matters, even if it has been silenced before.
3. **The importance of self-worth.** She taught that success begins with valuing yourself and your work. As she is often quoted: "Success is liking yourself, liking what you do, and liking how you do it."
4. **Never stop learning.** Books rescued her. She once put it this way: "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better."
5. **The power of empathy.** A saying often linked with her captures her spirit: people will forget what you said and did, but they will never forget how you made them feel.

Maya Angelou and Today's Young Women

Young women today face many challenges: too few women in leadership, poverty and lack of opportunity, discrimination at work, an unfair share of unpaid care work, and harmful social norms and cultural practices. From Angelou's life they can learn to be resilient, to use their voices, to value themselves and their education, and to practise empathy.

If something terrible has happened to you, and you have gone silent about it, please hear this: it was not your fault, and your story is not over. Find a trusted adult — a parent, teacher, pastor or counsellor — and let them help you find your voice again.

Mary's Thread

Mary found her voice in the Magnificat. Maya Angelou found hers after years of silence. Both remind us that God can turn a quiet, overlooked girl into a voice for generations.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- Is there a "silence" in your life that God wants to break?
- Who is your "Mrs Flowers" — or whose Mrs Flowers could you be?

Wangari Maathai

A Symphony of Resilience and Hope



Wangari Maathai (1940–2011)

It's the little things citizens do. That's what will make the difference. My little thing is planting trees.

— Wangari Maathai

In the central highlands of Kenya, on 1 April 1940, a girl was born in the village of Ihithe, near Nyeri, who would grow up to be a beacon of hope for women and for the earth. Her name was Wangari Maathai.

The Early Years

Wangari grew up close to the land. She remembered fetching water from a stream full of frog eggs, under a fig tree her mother told her was sacred. She was fortunate to go to school, which was rare for girls in her community. In 1960 she was one of about three hundred Kenyan students selected for scholarships to study in the United States. That opportunity became the first note in the symphony of her life.

The Challenges

She came home with degrees in biology and faced a country where men still decided what women could do. She was a woman in a patriarchal society, a scientist warning about deforestation in a country that profited from cutting trees, and an activist in a dangerous political environment. When she became the first woman in East and Central Africa to earn a doctorate (in 1971, from the University of Nairobi), some men mocked her for being "too educated" for a woman. Her marriage later ended in divorce — a painful and public episode that exposed the expectations placed on an ambitious woman in public life.

The Trees

In the 1970s, rural women told her their streams were drying up, their firewood was running out and their children were hungry. Wangari's answer was simple: plant trees. In 1977 she founded the Green Belt Movement, which paid women a small amount for every seedling that survived. Since then, the movement has planted more than fifty-one million trees in Kenya.

Her work put her in the path of powerful men. When she protested a government plan to build a skyscraper in Nairobi's Uhuru Park, she was ridiculed by the president and later beaten unconscious by police during a protest. She was arrested several times. She kept planting.

In 2004 she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, the first African woman to receive it. The Nobel Committee recognised what she had always known: that caring for the environment, defending democracy and empowering women belong together. She died in 2011, but the trees she planted are still growing.

Lessons from Wangari's Life

1. **Embrace education.** She believed in its power to transform — but not to uproot. "Education, if it means anything," she wrote, "should not take people away from the land, but instill in them even more respect for it."
2. **Respect creation.** "You cannot protect the environment unless you empower people, you inform them, and you help them understand that these resources are their own." Caring for the earth is caring for God's handiwork.
3. **Courage in the face of adversity.** Mockery, arrest and beatings did not stop her.
4. **The power of community.** She organised ordinary rural women into a movement. Change often starts in groups of people who refuse to accept things as they are.
5. **Persistence.** "I don't really know why I care so much," she once said. "I just have something inside me that tells me that there is a problem, and I have got to do something about it."

Mary's Thread

Mary planted a seed of faith and waited for it to grow. Wangari planted millions of seeds and waited too. Both teach us that the future is grown, not grabbed.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- What problem around you makes you think, "Somebody should do something"? Could that somebody be you?
- What is your "little thing"?

Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti

The Lioness of Lisabi



A dramatisation: an actress portrays Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti (1900–1978) leading the Abeokuta women. Film still.

*Open your mouth for the speechless, in the cause of all who are
appointed to die.*

— Proverbs 31:8 (NKJV)

Long before "women's empowerment" became a slogan printed on conference banners, a schoolteacher in Abeokuta was leading thousands of market women through the streets to demand justice. Long before

anyone had heard of Afrobeat, the mother of the man who created it was already making the powerful nervous.

The Girl Who Went to Grammar School

Frances Abigail Olufunmilayo Thomas was born on 25 October 1900 in Abeokuta, in present-day Ogun State. Her great-grandmother had been enslaved and later returned home from Sierra Leone, and her family was Christian and valued education. In a time when many people believed a girl's education was a waste of school fees, young Funmilayo became one of the first girls to attend Abeokuta Grammar School. She later travelled to England, to Cheshire, to continue her studies.

And here is the first sign of the woman she would become. When she came home, she dropped her English name, Frances, and chose to be called by her Yoruba name. At a time when "civilised" meant copying the colonial masters, she decided that being educated did not mean being ashamed of who she was.

She became a teacher, and in 1925 she married the Reverend Israel Oludotun Ransome-Kuti, a respected clergyman and educator who shared her passion for justice. Their home became a nursery of Nigerian greatness. Their daughter Dolupo became a teacher; their son Olikoye became a world-renowned doctor and Nigeria's Minister of Health; Beko became a doctor and human rights campaigner; and Fela became the musician who created Afrobeat and sang truth to military governments. When people ask how one family produced so many fighters, the answer usually begins with their mother.

From a Ladies' Club to a Women's Army

In 1932 she started the Abeokuta Ladies' Club. At first it was a gathering of educated, Christian women doing charity work and learning etiquette. But Funmilayo soon noticed something that troubled her deeply: the

market women of Egbaland — the women who fed the city — could not read, and they were being crushed.

Under the colonial system, the Alake (the traditional ruler) and the British authorities imposed heavy, unfair taxes on women. Tax collectors harassed them, beat them, and even stripped young girls to check their ages for tax purposes. Market goods were seized. Women had no vote and no voice.

So Funmilayo made a decision that changed everything. She opened the club to every woman, literate or not, and in 1946 it became the Abeokuta Women's Union — with reports of up to 20,000 members. She deliberately organised across class and education lines, spoke to the women in plain Yoruba, and increasingly wore Yoruba dress rather than presenting herself through colonial respectability. She stood with the market women as one of them.

The Market Women's Revolt

What followed was one of the great protest movements in African history. The women organised petitions, press campaigns, sit-ins and marches. Thousands of women camped outside the Alake's palace for days and nights, singing songs of resistance and refusing to go home. When officials tried to intimidate them, they sang louder.

The pressure was so great that in 1949 the Alake left the throne and went into exile for a time, and the unfair taxes on women were abolished. Abeokuta's market women — the ones who had been told they had no power — had just toppled a king.

A National and Global Voice

Funmilayo did not stop at Abeokuta. In 1947 she was the only woman in the delegation of Nigerian leaders who travelled to London to argue for Nigeria's self-government. She helped build national women's organisations, campaigned for women's right to vote, and was later

appointed to the Western House of Chiefs — a rare honour for a woman. She travelled to China, the Soviet Union and elsewhere to speak against colonialism, and in 1970 she received the Lenin Peace Prize.

And yes, popular histories remember her as one of the first women in Nigeria to drive a car. Imagine the looks on the Abeokuta road! More important than the novelty of the car was what it represented: mobility, independence and a refusal to remain in the place society had assigned her.

The people gave her titles that tell the story: the *Lioness of Lisabi* (after Lisabi, the legendary Egba hero who led his people to freedom) and, to many, the *Mother of Africa*.

The Price

Courage has a price. In February 1977, soldiers raided her son Fela's compound in Lagos, known as the Kalakuta Republic. Funmilayo, then in her late seventies, was thrown from an upstairs window. She never recovered from her injuries and died on 13 April 1978. Fela later carried a coffin to the gates of the government barracks in protest and sang about it for the rest of his life. In 2019, Google honoured her 119th birthday with a Doodle seen around the world.

Lessons from Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti's Life

1. **Education is for service.** She had privileges most women didn't. She used them to lift those who had none.
2. **Be proud of who you are.** She dropped "Frances" and wore Yoruba dress. Your identity is not a problem to be solved.
3. **Stand with the people you serve.** She did not lead from a distance; she marched at their side.
4. **Organise.** One angry woman is a complaint. Thousands of organised women are a movement.

5. **Ordinary people are powerful together.** Illiterate market women brought down a king.
6. **Courage costs, but silence costs more.** She paid with her life. The women of Abeokuta gained their dignity.
7. **Raise children who carry the fire.** Her greatest legacy may be the sons and daughter who continued her fight.

Mary's Thread

Mary sang that God "has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly" (Luke 1:52). Funmilayo lived that verse on the streets of Abeokuta.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- Whose burdens have you noticed but not yet stood up for?
- How could you use your education or privileges to serve people who have less?
- What would it look like to be proud of your own language, culture and name?

CHAPTER 9

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

Madam President



Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (b. 1938)

Strength and honour are her clothing; she shall rejoice in time to come.

— Proverbs 31:25 (NKJV)

In the quiet corners of Monrovia, where the evening sun casts long shadows on cracked pavements, there is a tale of resilience and audacity. It is the story of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the woman who defied the odds,

shattered glass ceilings and became the first elected female head of state in Africa.

The Phoenix Rises

I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will.

— Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*

Ellen Johnson was born in Monrovia, Liberia, on 29 October 1938. She grew up in a world where women were pushed to the margins and their voices stifled by tradition. She studied at the College of West Africa in Monrovia, married at seventeen and had four sons. The marriage was difficult, but her hunger for knowledge burned brighter than her circumstances. She studied accounting and economics in the United States and earned a master's degree in public administration from Harvard University in 1971.

The Prisoner of Conscience

For a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again.

— Proverbs 24:16 (NKJV)

Back in Liberia she rose to become Minister of Finance. Then, in 1980, a military coup brought Samuel Doe to power, and many government officials were executed. Ellen escaped, but when she returned and openly criticised Doe's government, she was arrested. In 1985 she was sentenced to ten years in prison. Under international pressure she was released, but she was forced into exile again. There she worked for international banks and the United Nations, including as director of the UNDP's Africa bureau, all the while speaking out for her country as it collapsed into civil war.

The Unyielding Optimist

Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.

— Helen Keller

She returned home and ran for president in 1997. Charles Taylor, the warlord whose forces had helped plunge the nation into war, won. Ellen went back into exile but did not give up. After the war ended in 2003, the people — especially Liberia's women, who had prayed and protested for peace — were ready for something new. In 2005 she was elected president. She took office in January 2006 and served two terms, rebuilding a shattered nation, reducing its crippling debt and restoring hope.

The Nobel Laureate

Peace is not merely a distant goal that we seek, but a means by which we arrive at that goal.

— Martin Luther King Jr.

In 2011, the Nobel Committee awarded the Peace Prize to Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, her fellow Liberian Leymah Gbowee, and Tawakkol Karman of Yemen, "for their non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women's rights to full participation in peace-building work." Three women, one prize — a torch passed to the next generation.

The Guiding Light

I am not afraid of storms, for I am learning how to sail my ship.

— Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women*

Her presidency was not perfect, and she had her critics. But her life still whispers to women today: *Be unyielding. Be audacious. Be the change.* Leadership is not about gender; it is about courage, compassion and commitment. As women, we stand on her shoulders, our dreams woven

into her legacy. She urges us to sail through the storms, because beyond them lies a horizon full of possibility.

Lessons from Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's Life

1. **Knowledge is a ladder.** From a difficult early marriage to Harvard, she kept climbing.
2. **Stand for truth, even when it costs.** She went to prison rather than keep quiet.
3. **Losing is not the end.** She lost an election and came back to win two.
4. **Women's collective courage changes nations.** Liberia's praying, protesting women paved the way for her victory.
5. **Leadership means rebuilding.** Her greatest work was not winning power but restoring a broken country.

Mary's Thread

Mary's song promised that God lifts up the lowly. In a nation torn apart by war, God lifted a once-imprisoned woman to its highest office.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- What would you attempt if you knew that one failure was not the end?
- What "broken" thing in your community could you help rebuild?

CHAPTER 10

Oprah Winfrey

A Beacon of Resilience and Empowerment



Oprah Winfrey (b. 1954)

*Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues
of life.*

— Proverbs 4:23 (NKJV)

In the heart of the Mississippi Delta, where cotton fields stretch like an endless sea, a remarkable story began. Oprah Gail Winfrey was born on 29 January 1954 in Kosciusko, Mississippi, to a teenage mother. She was born into poverty and would rise to become one of the most influential women

in the world. Her life, a symphony of trials and triumphs, still urges young women to look beyond the superficial and discover their inner strength.

From Shadows to Spotlight

Oprah's early years were marked by struggle. Until she was six, she was raised by her grandmother on a farm, sometimes wearing dresses made from potato sacks. Her grandmother taught her to read before she was three, and she recited Bible verses in church. Later, living with her mother in Milwaukee, she suffered abuse and became a troubled teenager. Everything changed when she went to live with her father in Nashville, Tennessee. He was strict. He demanded good grades and made her read a book every week and write a report on it. (Nigerian fathers, you are not alone. The "go and read your book" gospel is international.) She won a scholarship to Tennessee State University, and at nineteen she became the first Black woman news anchor at a Nashville TV station.

Her journey from rural Mississippi to global fame is like a lotus rising from muddy water.

The Power of Vulnerability

In 1986 *The Oprah Winfrey Show* went national, and for twenty-five years it was the most-watched talk show in America. Oprah's candidness became her superpower. She shared her own pain on air, inviting millions into her living room. In a world obsessed with facades, she showed that authenticity is magnetic. It's okay to be flawed, to cry, to heal. Vulnerability isn't weakness; it's courage.

The Art of Listening

I've talked to nearly 30,000 people on this show, and all 30,000 had one thing in common: They all wanted validation.

— Oprah Winfrey, Harvard commencement address, 2013

Her show was not about her; it was about them — the guests, their stories, their pain. She leaned in, eyes wide, heart open. In a cacophony of noise she found the symphony of shared humanity. Listening is an act of love. It heals wounds, bridges gaps and ignites change.

The Ripple Effect

Oprah's giving goes beyond writing cheques. In 2007 she opened the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls in South Africa, to give bright girls from poor families a world-class education. She has funded scholarships, schools and causes around the world. But perhaps her greatest gift is inspiring others to do the same. Every kindness, every encouragement is like a pebble dropped in a pond, sending out waves of change.

The Dance of Purpose

Success isn't enough; significance is the true dance. Oprah has often said that the key is not to chase success for its own sake but to work towards being significant — to live a life that matters to others. When we align our steps with purpose, life becomes a graceful dance, and our legacy is written in people's hearts.

In the quiet moments, Oprah's message to young women is simple: *You are enough*. Her life — a canvas painted with resilience, compassion and wisdom — calls young women away from shortcuts and towards meaningful journeys. Or, to borrow a saying she has often echoed: your life is your message to the world, so make it an inspiring one.

Lessons from Oprah Winfrey's Life

1. **Your beginning is not your ending.** Poverty and abuse did not have the final word.
2. **Discipline opens doors.** Her father's weekly book reports changed her future.

3. **Authenticity is powerful.** People connect with real stories, not perfect images.
4. **Listen more than you speak.** Everyone wants to be seen and heard.
5. **Use your platform to lift others.** Influence is a responsibility, not just a reward.

Mary's Thread

God "regarded the lowly state of His maidservant." Oprah's story is proof that He still notices girls whom the world overlooks.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- Who has been the "strict father" figure in your life — someone whose discipline you now appreciate?
- How could you use whatever platform you have (even a small one) to lift someone else?

Mary Slessor

The Mother of All the Peoples



Mary Slessor (1848–1915), missionary in Calabar. Archival photograph.

*And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season
we shall reap if we do not lose heart.*

— Galatians 6:9 (NKJV)

Here is a woman who started life far from Nigeria, never had much money, never married, stood barely five feet tall — and ended her life as one of the most loved women in the history of Calabar. Her face was once

printed on Scottish banknotes. Her name is on schools, streets and a hospital in Cross River State. Let me tell you why.

The Mill Girl

Mary Slessor was born on 2 December 1848 in Aberdeen, Scotland, the second of seven children. Her mother was a devout Christian; her father, a shoemaker, drank away much of the family's money. The family moved to Dundee, a city of smoke and jute factories, and lived in the slums.

At eleven, Mary went to work in a jute mill — half the day at the loom, half the day in school. By fourteen she was working full time, twelve hours a day, to feed her family, because her father's drinking had made her the main breadwinner. She read her Bible propped up on the loom. (Nigerian readers will understand: this was the original "hustle while you study".)

Her mother loved reading the United Presbyterian Church's missionary magazine, full of stories about Calabar in West Africa. Little Mary would listen and dream. She taught Sunday school in the roughest streets of Dundee, where a gang once tried to scare her by swinging a heavy lead weight close to her head. She stood still and didn't flinch. The gang leader was so impressed that he and his friends started coming to her class.

Calabar

In 1876, at the age of twenty-seven, Mary sailed to Calabar in what is now Cross River State. She learned the Efik language so well that people said she spoke it like a native, and she soon asked to be sent further inland, away from the comfort of the mission compound, to places where few Europeans had ever lived. She moved into simple mud houses, ate local food, walked barefoot, and lived among the people instead of above them.

Against the Killing of Twins

In some communities of that region at the time, the birth of twins was believed to be a terrible curse. Twin babies were often abandoned in the

bush or killed, and their mothers driven out of the community. Mary could not accept it. She rescued abandoned twins, took them into her home and raised many of them as her own children — sometimes she had a whole houseful. She spoke against the practice everywhere she went, and slowly, community by community, it faded away.

She also stood against other deadly customs of the time, such as trial by poison and the killing of people at the funerals of important men. She did not fight with guns or government soldiers. She fought with presence, patience, respect and love — and she won the trust of the very chiefs whose traditions she was challenging.

"Ma" Slessor, the Magistrate

Among the Okoyong people, known then for fierce conflicts, Mary became a peacemaker. People came to her to settle disputes. In 1892 the British authorities appointed her vice-consul — effectively a magistrate — for Okoyong, making her one of the first women in the British Empire to hold such a post. She held court sitting in her rocking chair, sometimes knitting while she listened to the case. Imagine a tiny Scottish woman in a rocking chair telling two quarrelling chiefs to sit down and behave — and they did.

The people called her *Eka Kpukpro Owo* — "Mother of all the peoples."

The Last Years

Years of fever, malaria and hard living wore her body down. Towards the end she could hardly walk and was pushed around in a small cart. But she refused to leave. She died on 13 January 1915 at Use Ikot Oku, near Itu, after nearly forty years in Nigeria. She was given a state funeral in Calabar. From 1997 to 2009, her portrait appeared on the Scottish ten-pound note — a mill girl from the slums, honoured by a nation.

Lessons from Mary Slessor's Life

1. **Hardship can prepare you.** The mill girl who worked twelve-hour days was tough enough for the Nigerian bush. Your struggles may be your training.
2. **Challenge harmful traditions with love.** She didn't mock the people; she rescued their children and changed their minds.
3. **Learn the language of the people you serve.** Real influence comes from real closeness.
4. **Courage looks small sometimes.** Five feet tall, standing still while a gang swung a weight at her head.
5. **Motherhood is bigger than biology.** She never married, yet she was mother to many.
6. **Cross boundaries for God.** She left everything familiar to serve people the world had forgotten.

A Word of Balance

Mary Slessor worked during the colonial era, and historians today rightly remind us that missionaries operated within that system. But what the people of Calabar chose to remember about her is telling: not a foreign ruler, but a mother who rescued their children. Honour her for the lives she saved.

Mary's Thread

Mary of Nazareth fled with her baby to protect Him from a king who wanted Him dead. Mary Slessor spent her life protecting babies whom her world wanted dead. Both were Mothers of Good.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- Is there a "tradition" in your community that harms people? How could you challenge it with love?
- Who could you "mother" — even if they are not your own child?
- What hardship in your past might God be using as training?

Amanda Obidike

A Tapestry of Resilience and Radiance



Amanda Obidike

She considers a field and buys it; from her profits she plants a vineyard.

— Proverbs 31:16 (NKJV)

Not every Mother of Good lived centuries ago. Some of them are still at work, and you can follow them online. Amanda Obidike is one of them.

The Genesis of a Luminary

Amanda grew up in Nigeria, where the air hums with dreams and the streets pulse with ambition. From the start she danced to her own rhythm. Her love for science began early — the wonder of how things work, the logic of numbers, the hidden stories inside data. But she also noticed something troubling: in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), girls were often missing. Many were told, openly or quietly, that those subjects were "for boys."

Amanda decided to do something about it. She founded **STEMi Makers Africa**, an initiative that introduces young Africans — especially girls and young women — to STEM skills like coding, robotics and digital innovation. Through programmes such as her **STEM Novation** initiative, girls have learned mobile app development and 3D modelling. In a world where glass ceilings threaten to crush dreams, Amanda brought in steel beams of possibility.

A Leader of Leaders

Beyond algorithms and circuits, Amanda invested in people. Drawing on leadership training she received through Santa Clara University in California, she mentored young leaders and taught emotional intelligence, courage and compassion alongside technical skills. Her work has earned international recognition, including being named among the **TechWomen100**, and her voice has been heard on platforms from universities and embassies to international media.

Yet what matters most is not the awards. It is the young women who now believe that a laboratory, a boardroom or a coding bootcamp is a place where they belong.

Lessons from Amanda Obidike's Journey

1. **Forge your own path.** The stars don't follow maps; they create them.

2. **STEM is for you.** Science, technology, engineering and mathematics are not "boys' subjects." They are tools to transform lives — including yours.
3. **Let competence be your compass.** Excellence speaks louder than stereotypes.
4. **Lead with empathy.** Leadership isn't about titles; it's about service, resilience and the courage to go first.
5. **Measure success by impact.** The true measure of success is not trophies but the ripples of change you create.

Mary's Thread

Mary's yes opened a door that was closed to everyone before her. Amanda Obidike is holding doors open for a new generation of African girls. Walk through them.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- Which subject or skill have you avoided because someone said it wasn't "for girls"?
- Who is a woman working in your field today whom you could learn from?

Winnie Byanyima

A Trailblazer's Journey



Winnie Byanyima (b. 1959)

*He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the
Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk
humbly with your God?*

— Micah 6:8 (NKJV)

Winnie Byanyima was born on 13 January 1959 in Mbarara District, Uganda. Her story is proof that a girl who is told "you can't" can go on to fly aeroplanes, fight for freedom and lead global organisations.

Early Life and Education

Winnie grew up in a family of seven. Her father, Boniface Byanyima, was a politician who later became national chairman of Uganda's Democratic Party; her mother, Gertrude, was a dedicated schoolteacher. Their home was full of books and political debate — the kind of house where even dinner came with an argument about the constitution. Winnie attended Mount Saint Mary's College Namagunga, one of Uganda's best girls' schools, and then went to the University of Manchester in England to study aeronautical engineering — becoming Uganda's first female aeronautical engineer. She later earned a master's degree in mechanical engineering, specialising in energy conservation, from Cranfield University.

From Flight Engineer to Freedom Fighter

She came home and worked as a flight engineer for Uganda Airlines. But Uganda was suffering under brutal and corrupt governments. When Yoweri Museveni launched a guerrilla war in 1981, Winnie left her comfortable job and joined the rebellion. She had known Museveni since childhood; her family had helped support his education. She fought in the bush with the National Resistance Army, where she met her future husband, Kizza Besigye.

Diplomacy and Politics

After the rebels took power in 1986, Winnie served as Uganda's ambassador to France from 1989 to 1994. Back home, she was a member of the Constituent Assembly that drafted the 1995 constitution, and served two terms as a Member of Parliament for Mbarara Municipality. Over time she became a strong critic of corruption and of the government she had once fought to install — an act of courage in itself. She later directed the Women, Gender and Development Directorate of the African Union Commission in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Oxfam and UNAIDS

From 2013 to 2019 she was Executive Director of Oxfam International, campaigning against extreme inequality and poverty. In November 2019 she became Executive Director of UNAIDS, the United Nations programme leading the global fight against HIV and AIDS, where she has championed access to treatment for the world's poorest people.

Lessons from Winnie Byanyima's Journey

1. **Pursue education fearlessly.** She entered a field almost no women had entered. Knowledge knows no gender.
2. **Courage sometimes means leaving comfort.** She left a secure job to fight for her country's freedom.
3. **Advocate for equality.** She has spent decades raising women's voices and fighting discrimination.
4. **Build bridges.** Diplomacy, dialogue and collaboration can be powerful tools for change.
5. **Stay true to your principles.** She was willing to criticise even her old allies when they went wrong.

Behind the public figure is a woman who balanced family, activism and leadership, with sacrifices and struggles most people never see. Her life lights a path of courage, education, advocacy, diplomacy and resilience.

Mary's Thread

Mary said yes to a calling that took her far from the quiet life she expected. So did Winnie. Both remind us that God's plans are often bigger than our comfort zones.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- What "comfortable job" or safe option might God be asking you to hold loosely?
- Are you willing to speak up when people you admire go wrong?

Dora Akunyili

A Note of Courage and Legacy



Professor Dora Nkem Akunyili (1954–2014)

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

— Romans 12:21 (NKJV)

We met Dora briefly in Part I. Now let me tell her whole story. Professor Dora Nkem Akunyili's life was a symphony of courage, resilience and unwavering commitment to excellence.

The Early Notes

Dora was born on **14 July 1954** in the bustling town of Makurdi, in present-day Benue State. Her father, **Chief Paul Young Edemobi**, came from Nanka in Anambra State. From the very beginning her brilliance shone like a distant star. All through primary school she competed with a boy who matched her stride for stride. When they finished, she won a scholarship to secondary school.

At **Queen of the Rosary College** in Nsukka, her flame burned brighter. She graduated with a **Grade I distinction** in the West African School Certificate examination. Scholarships from the Eastern Nigerian government and the Federal Government carried her to the **University of Nigeria, Nsukka**, where she studied pharmacy, graduating in 1978, and later earned a PhD in pharmacology.

Career and Purpose

She worked as a hospital pharmacist at the **University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital** in Enugu, then became a **senior lecturer** and **consultant pharmacologist** at the university's College of Medicine. Her passion for service went beyond the classroom. As **Zonal Secretary of the Petroleum (Special) Trust Fund (PTF)**, she supervised projects funded by oil revenues in Nigeria's South-East, and became known for returning unspent money — something almost unheard of.

The Crescendo

Then came the great crisis of her life, the one that had been waiting since 1988. That year her younger sister, Vivian, a diabetic, died after being given fake insulin. Counterfeit medicines were everywhere in Nigeria; some studies suggested that a large share of drugs in circulation were fake or substandard.

In **2001**, President **Olusegun Obasanjo** appointed her **Director-General of the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration**

and Control (NAFDAC). Here her symphony reached its crescendo. She rebuilt the agency, recruited a team that included many determined women pharmacists and inspectors, and declared war on counterfeit drugs. They shut down open-air drug markets, seized and publicly burned fake medicines worth billions of naira, and blacklisted foreign manufacturers who exported fakes to Nigeria.

The criminals fought back. Her offices were burned. She received death threats. On 26 December 2003, gunmen opened fire on her convoy; a bullet went through her headscarf and grazed her scalp. She did not resign. Criminals who thought a woman in a headscarf would run had clearly never met a determined Igbo mother. She later served as Nigeria's Minister of Information and Communications from 2008 to 2010, and received many national and international honours for her work.

The Final Chord

On **7 June 2014**, after a battle with cancer, Dora Akunyili's earthly symphony reached its final chord. Nigerians of every tribe and party mourned her. Her funeral echoed her life's refrain: a melody of courage, compassion and unyielding hope.

Lessons from Dora Akunyili's Legacy

- 1. Unyielding integrity.** She stood against corruption even when the odds seemed impossible. Her moral compass can guide ours.
- 2. Fearless advocacy.** She risked her life to protect others. Meaningful change often requires stepping into the storm.
- 3. Education as empowerment.** Her journey from scholarship girl to national leader shows the transforming power of education.
- 4. Breaking barriers.** As a woman in a male-dominated field, she proved that women can lead the hardest fights.

5. **Turn pain into purpose.** Her sister's death became the fuel for saving millions of lives.

Mary's Thread

Mary watched her Son suffer for the sins of the world. Dora watched her sister die from the sins of greedy men. Both turned grief into something that gave life to others.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- What pain in your life could God turn into purpose?
- Where do you see "counterfeits" in your world — things that look good but harm people?

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala

The Story of Resilience



Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (b. 1954)

*Do you see a man who excels in his work? He will stand before
kings; he will not stand before unknown men.*

— Proverbs 22:29 (NKJV)

Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala's life reads like a captivating novel, full of twists, turns and moments of sheer brilliance.

The Early Chapters

Ngozi was born on **13 June 1954** in the town of **Ogwashi-Ukwu**, in present-day Delta State, Nigeria. Her father, **Professor Chukwuka Okonjo**, was the **Obi** (king) of Ogwashi-Ukwu, from the Obahai royal family, and her mother, Professor Kamene Okonjo, was a sociologist. As a child during the Nigerian Civil War, she lived through hunger and danger; she has told of carrying her sick little sister on her back to a doctor. From her parents she learned that education is the key that unlocks doors.

The Academic Odyssey

She studied at **Queen's School, Enugu**, **St Anne's School, Molete, Ibadan**, and the **International School, Ibadan**. Her hunger for knowledge carried her across the Atlantic. At **Harvard University** she earned her bachelor's degree in economics with high honours in 1976, and at the **Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)** she earned a PhD in regional economics and development in 1981.

The World Bank Years

The **World Bank** became her canvas. Over twenty-five years she worked on development and poverty reduction around the world, eventually rising to **Managing Director**, the Bank's second-highest position.

The Finance Minister's Baton

In 2003 President **Olusegun Obasanjo** called her home to be Minister of Finance — the first woman ever to hold the post. She fought for transparency, began publishing how much money each state received from the Federation Account, and led negotiations with the Paris Club of creditors that in 2005 wiped out about **18 billion US dollars** of Nigeria's foreign debt. In 2006 she briefly served as **Minister of Foreign Affairs**, again the first woman in that role. Under President **Goodluck Jonathan**,

she returned as Finance Minister and Coordinating Minister for the Economy from **2011 to 2015**.

It was not easy. She faced fierce opposition from people who benefited from corruption. In 2012 her own mother, then in her eighties, was kidnapped; the kidnappers demanded that Ngozi resign. Her mother was eventually released, but the ordeal showed the real price of standing for reform.

The Glass Ceilings Shattered

And then came the moment that will echo through history. On **1 March 2021**, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala became the **first woman** and the **first African** to lead the **World Trade Organization (WTO)** as its **Director-General**. The world watched as she shattered one more glass ceiling. Her member governments later reappointed her for a second term.

The Lessons Carved in Stone

- 1. Courage knows no borders.** Courage doesn't need a passport; it lives in the hearts of those who dare.
- 2. Resilience is the art of bouncing back.** Setbacks are commas, not full stops.
- 3. Leadership is service.** At the World Bank, in Abuja and in Geneva, her leadership was about serving people.
- 4. Trailblazing is a team sport.** She carried the dreams of countless women and girls.
- 5. Excellence opens doors.** She stood before kings because she excelled at her work.

She faced gender bias in male-dominated institutions, economic turmoil, political attacks, and the constant tension between a demanding career and family life. Yet she emerged from these crucibles not as a victim but as a beacon.

Mary's Thread

Mary came from obscure Nazareth; Ngozi from a small town in Delta State. Both remind us that God can take a girl from a small place and put her on the world's stage.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- What would it mean for you to "excel in your work" — at school, at home or on the job?
- Are you prepared to pay a price for doing the right thing?

Harriet Tubman

A Beacon of Courage and Freedom



Harriet Tubman (c. 1822–1913)

I never ran my train off the track and I never lost a passenger.

— Harriet Tubman, 1896

In the terrible days of slavery in nineteenth-century America, a woman rose who became a lighthouse of bravery, tenacity and determination. Her life is a tribute to the unbreakable human longing for freedom. Her name was Harriet Tubman.

From Bondage to Liberation

Harriet was born around 1822 in Dorchester County, Maryland, and named Araminta Ross; her family called her "Minty." She grew up in a society where chains governed every part of her life. She was hired out to work from the age of five or six, checking muskrat traps in freezing water and later labouring in the fields. When she was about twelve, an overseer threw a heavy iron weight at another enslaved person; it struck Harriet in the head. The injury left her with seizures, headaches and sudden sleeping spells for the rest of her life. She also began to have vivid dreams and visions, which she believed came from God.

Even so, she never stopped dreaming of freedom.

The Journey to Freedom

In 1849, when she was about twenty-seven, rumours spread that she would be sold. Harriet decided to run. Her husband, John Tubman, a free Black man, would not go with her. She set out alone, travelling by night and guided by the North Star, along a secret network of routes and safe houses known as the Underground Railroad, until she reached Pennsylvania and freedom.

"When I found I had crossed that line," she said later, "I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person. There was such a glory over everything."

The Conductor of Hope

But freedom for herself was not enough. Over the next decade, Harriet went back into Maryland about thirteen times and led roughly seventy people to freedom, including her own parents and siblings, and gave instructions that helped dozens more. She faced bloodhounds, crossed freezing rivers and travelled through moonless nights. She carried a pistol — as much to encourage frightened runaways to keep going as for

protection. People called her "Moses." Years later she could say with pride: "I never ran my train off the track and I never lost a passenger."

Faith and Danger

Slaveholders offered rewards for runaways, and Harriet lived with constant danger. (The famous story of a 40,000-dollar bounty on her head is a legend that historians have not been able to confirm.) She disguised herself, changed routes and trusted God. "I always told God," she said, "I'm going to hold steady on You, and You've got to see me through."

Beyond the Railroad

During the American Civil War she served the Union army as a nurse, scout and spy. In June 1863 she guided the Combahee River Raid in South Carolina, which freed more than seven hundred enslaved people in a single night — making her one of the first women in American history to help lead an armed military operation. After the war she cared for the elderly and poor in her home in Auburn, New York, and campaigned for women's right to vote. She died in 1913.

Lessons from Harriet's Light

1. **Fear is not the enemy.** She didn't suppress fear; she turned it into resolve. Fear need not paralyse us — it can propel us.
2. **Compassion fuels courage.** She went back for others when she could have stayed safe. Kindness is a mighty force.
3. **Persistence triumphs over obstacles.** Seizures, danger and relentless pursuit could not stop her.
4. **Allies are essential.** She worked with abolitionists, Quakers and ordinary people who opened their homes. No one frees a nation alone.
5. **Hold steady on God.** Her courage was rooted in prayer and trust.

The woman who refused to accept slavery, who whispered hope in the dead of night, and who still inspires everyone who dares to dream is Harriet Tubman. May her story echo through the ages.

Mary's Thread

Mary sang that God "has filled the hungry with good things." Harriet went back, again and again, to fill the hungry with freedom.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- Once you find freedom — from a habit, a fear, a situation — who could you go back for?
- What would it mean for you to "hold steady" on God this year?

Deborah Chizaram Nnamani

A Daughter of Light



Deborah Chizaram Nnamani (2002–2026)

*Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers
in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.*

— 1 Timothy 4:12 (NKJV)

Some of the Mothers of Good in this book lived long lives and left long lists of achievements. Deborah Chizaram Nnamani did not get that chance. She was twenty-three years old when she died in July 2026, just as adult life seemed to be opening in front of her.

I did not know Deborah personally. I came to know her the way thousands of Nigerians did: through the words she left online and through the flood of tributes that followed her death. Friends and fellow writers remembered a gifted communicator, a generous friend and a young Christian who spoke openly about her faith. Her own public writing shows the same combination: practical lessons on storytelling and personal branding sitting side by side with reflections on mortality, purpose and Jesus.

A Life Lived Forward

Deborah's middle name, *Chizaram*, is Igbo. It means "God answered me." Her first name, of course, belongs to the prophetess and judge we met earlier in this book — the woman who arose "a mother in Israel." It is hard to imagine a better pair of names for a young woman of faith.

Deborah described herself publicly as a content strategist and storytelling coach. She used words to teach brands and young professionals how to communicate with clarity, but she also wrote about deeper things: purpose, mortality, humility and faith. In a digital world where many young people are paid to show their bodies, Deborah used her platform to show her mind and her Maker. In a timeline full of noise, she tried to make her words useful.

Friends remembered that she had only recently completed her National Youth Service Corps year — that rite of passage every Nigerian graduate knows: the khaki that never fits, the orientation camp, the "Corper, wetin dey?", and the strange feeling that real life is finally about to begin. Her future looked wide open. Then, suddenly, it was over.

Public memorial information records that Deborah was born on 2 December 2002 and died on 22 July 2026. Many who mourned her spoke of her faith and saw her as a witness for Christ. Because reliable public reporting does not establish the circumstances of her death, this edition

does not speculate about them. Her place in this book rests on the life and words that can be documented.

Why She Belongs Here

You may ask: why put a twenty-three-year-old alongside presidents, Nobel laureates and queens?

Because the heart of this book is not celebrity or the length of a CV. It is what a person does with the time, gifts and convictions she has. Mary was a teenager when she said yes to God. Deborah was young when she began building a public voice for good. Neither needed decades of achievement before her choices mattered.

A short life forces an uncomfortable question: are we postponing the work that matters because we assume we have more time? The evidence we have is enough — Deborah wrote, taught, encouraged people and spoke about her faith while she had the opportunity.

Jesus never promised His followers a long or easy road. But He did promise: "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul" (Matthew 10:28). And He promised that those who believe in Him, though they die, shall live (John 11:25).

Lessons from a Short Life

1. **Your age is not a disqualification.** Paul told young Timothy to be an example "in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity." Deborah was an example at twenty-three.
2. **Use your gifts now.** She did not wait for a perfect platform. She wrote with what she had, where she was.
3. **Redeem the digital space.** Social media can be a place of light. Your timeline can preach.
4. **Live ready.** None of us is promised tomorrow. Live every day as if it matters to eternity, because it does.

- 5. Faithfulness is the real success.** At the end, the question will not be how many followers you had, but whether you were faithful.

Mary's Thread

Mary was young when her yes to God began shaping a story larger than herself. Deborah was young when she began using her voice in public. The connection is not that their stories were the same, but that neither waited for age, title or perfect conditions before taking her convictions seriously. For every young reader, that is the challenge: begin now.

Rest well, Deborah. God answered you — and your words are still speaking.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- If your life ended at twenty-three, what would people say about how you used it?
- How can you use your phone, your pen or your platform to point people to God this week?

Madam Janet Imuetinyan Orumgbe

The Timber Woman



Madam Janet Imuetinyan Orumgbe, née Ozabor (1958–2025)

She rises also while it is yet night, and provides food for her household... She considers a field and buys it; from her profits she plants a vineyard... Her children rise up and call her blessed.

— Proverbs 31:15–16, 28 (NKJV)

I have saved this chapter for last because it is the one I know best, and the one it hurts most to write.

This is the story of my mother.

A Child Who Was Different

In the thick bush country of Evokhimwen, in the Esan land of Edo State, a baby girl was born in 1958 to Lawrence and Margaret Ozabor. They named her Janet. From the day she arrived, it was clear that she was not an ordinary child.

She was born with locks in her hair — the natural matted locks that we in Edo call *agbiyaga*. It was very unusual for a baby girl. In our culture, such children are treated with a kind of awe, and their hair is not supposed to be cut carelessly. Whenever I think of it, I remember Samson in the Bible, the man to whom God said that no razor should come upon his head (Judges 13:5), and whose strength was tied to that consecration. Looking back over my mother's life, I sometimes think there was a strength in Janet that also came from somewhere beyond her.

There was something else. The shape of her skull, from birth, had a natural ridge that ran around her head, like the crown of a bishop's mitre. As she grew, people said she carried herself like a chief. Her parents did not yet know it, but their girl child was an extraordinary one.

Lesson 1: Take Responsibility Before You Are "Ready"

Janet was not the first child of her parents. But she was the first daughter, and from her earliest years she lived as if she were the firstborn. When her mother gave birth to twin girls, she was left sickly and weak, and Janet — still a child herself — took responsibility for her little sisters. She fed them, bathed them and carried them.

Her father, Pa Lawrence, was a peasant hunter. Sometimes he would go into the forest and not return for days. In those days, it was Janet who held the house together. Remember what we said about Mary in Insight

Three: God is looking for availability, not readiness. Nobody asked Janet if she was ready to be a mother at ten. She was simply available, and she stepped up.

Lesson 2: Poverty Is Where You Start, Not Where You Stay

My mother tasted poverty early, and she tasted it deeply.

She told me a story I have never forgotten. When she was about twelve or thirteen, she went into the forest one evening to pluck wild vegetables to sell. The family needed money, and she wanted to gather enough leaves to earn a few coins — this was before the naira came in 1973, when a little money could still buy a meal. She kept going deeper and deeper, looking for more leaves, until the light was gone. She was lost.

She wandered through that dark forest almost all night. A little girl, alone, in the bush, with the sounds of the night all around her. And somehow — she always said it was God — she found her way home.

Whenever I think of that story, I see the whole of her life in it. She went into places that were dark and dangerous because her family needed her to. She kept walking when she could not see the path. And she always found her way home.

She began trading young. She would carry plantain, okra, corn and other farm produce all the way to markets in Lagos, sell them, and bring the money home so her family could eat. Think of it: a teenage girl from an Esan village, travelling to Lagos to trade, when many adults would not dare.

Poverty was her starting point. It was never her destination.

Lesson 3: Your Schooling Can End, but Your Education Must Not

Janet went to Okada Grammar School, in Ovia North-East, and she was a tough, bright girl. But because her mother was always ill and her father had many burdens, she could not focus on her books the way other girls could. Someone had to feed the family. She left school at about Form Four — roughly the level of SS1 today. She never finished secondary school.

In many stories, that would be the end. A girl who drops out of school in the 1970s to feed her siblings is supposed to disappear into a life of struggle.

Not Janet.

Remember Insight Nine: *schooling is what you are taught; education is what you teach yourself*. My mother had very little schooling, but she was one of the most educated people I have ever known. She understood money. She understood people. She understood hard work, negotiation, risk and loyalty. She could read a customer, a worker or a situation faster than most graduates I know. She never let her certificate — or the lack of it — decide her future.

Lesson 4: Enter the Room They Say Is Not for You

After she married my father, and with his help, Janet entered the timber business.

If you know anything about the timber trade in Edo State, you know it is a man's world. It means going deep into the forest, negotiating with landowners and fellers, hiring power-saw operators and loaders, dealing with lorry drivers, mechanics, checkpoints and sawmills, and carrying huge amounts of money and risk. It is rough, physical, dangerous work. Women were not expected to be there.

My mother went anyway. And she conquered it.

Before long, people were calling her *the timber woman*. At the age of twenty-seven she built her first house — something nobody in her family had ever done. She bought lorries and cars. She employed workers; at one point more than fifteen people worked for her. It was around that time, as her business was flourishing, that she gave birth to her third child — me, Azuka, the author of this book.

By the time she died, she had built more than three houses, acquired landed property, and left an inheritance for her children. Nobody had supported her. Nothing in her background suggested she would make it. She weathered every storm, against all odds, and did what most women — and many men — never do.



Madam Janet's world: from her Esan village to Okada, the Lagos markets and Benin City. Schematic, not to scale.

Lesson 5: She Never Listened to Distractions

My mother laboured, and she was mocked for it — by friends and even by family members. But she never gave up. She was focused and determined that, under God, she would do whatever it took to pull her family out of poverty. She was not a man, and she did not care. She did not listen to the distractions of her body or the distractions of her peers.

And let me tell you, the distractions were real. She told me that other women would laugh at her within her hearing. "Let us see what she will

become," they would say. "She dresses like a man. She doesn't have time for herself. She will suffer."

While some were busy warming the beds of men for money, my mother was working in the forest, cutting trees and selling timber. And before long, it became clear who was the sensible one.

I remember one particular day. Someone very important to her had died, and she had been invited to the burial. If you are from Edo State, you know what a burial means here. It is a big ceremony. As a woman, you are expected to dress in your very best — the most expensive lace, the matching gele, your club's uniform. There are canopies everywhere, and people come to show off.

That morning, her timber lorry broke down. She went to the mechanic with the driver and loaders to sort it out, and it took far longer than expected. By the time they finished, the burial was already under way. She had no time to go home and change. So she went straight from the mechanic's workshop to the burial, in her work clothes.

My brother, there was nothing people did not say that day. "See how she dresses." "She behaves like a man." She ignored it all. She simply walked up to the children of the deceased, gave them an envelope with thousands of naira in it, greeted the family, and left.

That money was more appreciated by that family than anything else anyone gave that day. The others came to eat and to be seen. My mother came to contribute.

Lesson 6: Be a Giver, Not Only a Receiver

My mother gave, and she kept giving to the very end.

When her parents grew old, she brought them to live with her in the house she built at Uwelu, in Benin City — in those days one of the finest houses you could find in that area. She cared for them herself. I was there when both of them passed away, at a great age, under her roof. My

grandfather, Baba, died at over a hundred and four years old. My grandmother, Iye, was about eighty-seven.

Janet gave to everyone. When it came to generosity, she was the woman to envy. She paid school fees for total strangers. Widows came to our house constantly to ask for help, and they did not go away empty-handed. She had a special love for old people. She helped pregnant women through childbirth. She knew many herbal remedies, and she helped several people recover from illness without collecting a kobo. Her last-born, Pastor David, used to call her *Oya biye* because of it. She was the neighbourhood pharmacy, only without the till.

She was an employer of labour. If you came to our house in those days, it was like a market. At one point, we joked, more people were living in our house than in an entire village! If you came for a short visit, you might leave three years later with a trade and a wife. Mama J — as many of us called her — took care of all of them.

She gave even when nobody gave back. One of my uncles, Mr Osahon Osayim, who now owns a big pharmacy in Uselu, grew up under her care; she provided everything for him. My aunties were helped by her. She carried the financial weight of her children's upbringing, and even helped my step-siblings. She did all this because she was a giver.

Mama J had a Benin proverb that is hard to translate into English. It says, in effect: *a closed fist receives nothing, but an open hand is always filled, because it gives*. She lived that proverb every day.

It is no accident, I think, that the palace of Queen Idia — the Iyoba, whom we met earlier in this book — stands at Uselu, not far from where my mother raised so many people who were not her own. Benin has always had women who were bigger than their titles.

Lesson 7: She Loved God

My mother did not know much about religion in her early life, but she loved God. She told me that when she was young she had a dream about what she would do with her life, and she set out to do it.

She was the one who taught me to sing songs at morning devotion. She sang, she danced and she prayed — so much that our neighbours thought she prayed too much. When her own mother's eyesight was failing, Mama J would sit with her and read the Bible aloud, telling her the stories, and you could hear the two of them laughing together. That is where I learned to be a homely, domestic person. I watched my mother serve without pride and speak of Jesus without shame.

She knew that "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong" (Ecclesiastes 9:11), but that victory belongs to God. So she would wake up in the middle of the night to pray — not for herself, but for her siblings, her friends, her children and people she barely knew.

In the last year of her life, she went out on evangelism. It was during that season that her illness grew worse. She fought for her life for more than six months. On **10 September 2025**, Madam Janet Imuetinyan Orumgbe went home to be with the Lord. She died in Christ, and I believe with all my heart that she is in heaven right now.



*"A devoted Christian, a joyful dancer, a fighter till the end." Madam Janet dancing.
Family photograph.*

What Will You Be Remembered For?

So here is the question my mother's life asks every one of us: *What will you be remembered for when you die?*

We are all going to die. If you, as a young woman, died today, what would people say about you? Would they talk about your outfits, your followers and your parties? Or would they talk about the people you fed, the children you sent to school, the widows you helped and the God you served?

Women are gateways by nature. Through a woman, life enters the world. Through a woman, the Saviour entered the world. My mother was not just a gate. She was a path. She was a movement. She was a leader.

She had no inheritance, very little schooling and no one cheering her on. She was mocked, dismissed and underestimated. And she still built houses, businesses and people. She fed her parents in their old age and her children in their youth. She gave until her hands were empty, and God kept filling them.

What will you do?

Lessons from the Timber Woman

1. **Take responsibility early.** Be available before you feel ready.
2. **Poverty is a starting point, not a sentence.** Keep walking, even in the dark.
3. **Keep educating yourself.** A lack of certificates does not have to mean a lack of knowledge.
4. **Enter the rooms they say are not for you.** Then conquer them with excellence.
5. **Ignore the distractions.** Let the mockers talk. Let your results answer them.
6. **Be a giver.** An open hand is always filled.
7. **Love God with your whole life.** Sing, dance, pray and serve without shame.

Mary's Thread

Mary was a village girl from a place people laughed at. She said yes to God, carried a burden no one else could carry, and gave the world the greatest gift it has ever received. My mother, a village girl from Esan, carried her family out of poverty on her own back and gave until her last breath.

Mummy, thank you for everything. You were a Mother of Good. Your legacy lives on in all of us.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- What would you want people to say about you at your funeral? What are you doing today to make it true?
- Who in your family has carried burdens so that you could have a better life? Have you thanked them?
- Where is God asking you to open your hand?

Afterword: Be a Mary



And blessed is she who believed.

— Luke 1:45 (NKJV)

We began in Nazareth, with a teenage girl digging nuts out of the sand while her mother shouted her name. We ended in Benin City, with a timber woman who went to a burial in her work clothes.

Between them stand queens and farm girls, a prophetess and a president, singers, scientists, missionaries, freedom fighters and a young corps member who died before her life had properly begun. They lived in different centuries, spoke different languages, and faced different enemies. But look closely and you will see the same pattern again and again:

- **An ordinary beginning.** Nazareth. Skopje. Swartekill. Kosciusko. An Esan village. Nobody expected much.
- **A moment of decision.** An angel. A call within a call. A lorry breaking down on the morning of a burial. Each woman had to choose between what her culture expected and what her calling required.
- **A price.** Gossip, prison, exile, beatings, mockery, loneliness — and for some, their very lives.
- **A legacy.** Schools, movements, laws, trees, songs, freed people, houses full of children who were fed and educated. Good that outlived the woman who birthed it.

That is what it means to be a culture shaper. It does not require a famous name or a rich father. It requires a yes.

So let me ask you one last time the question that has followed me since I was thirteen: *Where are the women like Mary?*

I hope, having read this book, you can answer: *Here I am.*

Be available. Be courageous. Be different. Be patient. Keep learning. Keep giving. Love God. And whatever He says to you, do it.

Let it be to me according to Your word.

Wisdom to Carry



Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding.

— Proverbs 4:7 (NKJV)

If you forget everything else in this book, keep these. One lesson from each Mother of Good — small enough to remember, big enough to live by.

1. **Mary:** Say yes to God before you understand everything.
2. **Mother Teresa:** Do small things with great love, and start where you are.
3. **Miriam Makeba:** Your gift can be a voice for people who have none.
4. **Sojourner Truth:** Your past can name you, but only God can define you.
5. **Deborah:** Someone may need to borrow your courage today.
6. **Queen Idia:** Step up in the crisis, and make room for the women after you.
7. **Maya Angelou:** A silenced girl can become a voice for generations.
8. **Wangari Maathai:** Find your "little thing" — and do it every day.
9. **Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti:** Ordinary people, organised, can move kings.
10. **Ellen Johnson Sirleaf:** Losing once is not losing forever.
11. **Oprah Winfrey:** Discipline today opens doors tomorrow.
12. **Mary Slessor:** Challenge harmful traditions with love, not mockery.
13. **Amanda Obidike:** No subject is "for boys only."

- 14. Winnie Byanyima:** Be willing to leave comfort for a calling.
- 15. Dora Akunyili:** Let your pain become someone else's protection.
- 16. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala:** Excellence will carry you before kings.
- 17. Harriet Tubman:** Once you are free, go back for someone else.
- 18. Deborah Chizaram Nnamani:** Don't wait for old age to live for God.
- 19. Madam Janet Orumgbe:** An open hand is always filled.

For Teachers, Parents and Youth Leaders



This book is being given freely to schools and youth groups, and it works best when it is read together. Here is a simple way to use it.

A Six-Week Reading Plan

1. **Week 1 — The Girl from Nazareth.** Read the Preface and Chapters 1–3. Discuss: What made Mary "available"?
2. **Week 2 — The Ten Insights (1–5).** Discuss the digital dilemma honestly. Invite students to count how much time they spend online each day.
3. **Week 3 — The Ten Insights (6–10).** Discuss courage, education and background. Ask each student to name one "impossible" goal.
4. **Week 4 — Mothers of Faith and Freedom.** Deborah, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Mary Slessor, Mother Teresa. Discuss: What does courage look like in our community?
5. **Week 5 — Mothers of Africa.** Queen Idia, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Dora Akunyili, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Wangari Maathai, Miriam Makeba, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Winnie Byanyima, Amanda Obidike. Ask students to research one more African woman not in this book.
6. **Week 6 — Mothers Close to Home.** Read the chapters on Deborah Chizaram Nnamani and Madam Janet Orumbe. Assignment: interview a Mother of Good in your own family or community, and write her story.

Activities That Work

- **The Hall of Honour wall.** Students draw or print a "gold frame" for a woman in their own life and write one lesson she taught them.
- **Debate day.** "Social media does more harm than good for young women." Let both sides speak.
- **Letter to my future self.** Students write what they want people to say about them at fifty.
- **Watch and discuss.** Play an episode of the Mothers of Good Show on YouTube and discuss the questions at the end of a chapter.

A Note for Boys

Don't leave the boys out. Ask them: How should a man treat a woman who is called by God? What did Joseph teach us? Culture shapers need brothers and sons who honour them.

About the Author



Azuka D. Orumgbe

Azuka D. Orumgbe is a biologist, author, speaker, corporate partnerships and retention professional, and AI strategist based in Benin City, Nigeria. He holds a Master of Science degree in Biology from the University of Benin and is currently pursuing an MBA. His passion for shaping culture led him to write thought-provoking weekly articles for teenagers, encouraging critical thinking and personal growth.

He is the founder of Deary Tech Enterprise and Agent University, where he equips young people and professionals with practical skills in artificial intelligence, Python programming and data analytics through the Reskill Nigeria initiative. He also serves in children's ministry at New Benin Baptist Church as a teacher and programme coordinator.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

His books include *When Action Is Not Enough*, *Set to Zero*, *Build or Burst* and *Do It All by Yourself*. His core mantra is simple: "*Nothing is impossible with God.*"

This revised edition of *And Mary, the Mother of Good* is dedicated to the memory of his mother, Madam Janet Imuetinyan Orungbe.



Watch the Mothers of Good Show: [youtube.com/@mothersofgood](https://www.youtube.com/@mothersofgood)