

# Things Do Fall Apart

March 2024

Last year was a watershed year for me – health wise. I turned 68 years old and things began to fall apart more noticeably, slowly, and almost deliberately. A piercing pain in my left foot named plantar fasciitis kept me from my favorite exercise of walking and hiking daily for nearly half the year. Because of an old football injury, a tendon in one of my fingers completely snapped leaving it permanently rigid and awkward. My dermatologist had me in his office three times last summer extracting cancer cells from the top of my head through Mohs surgery. And then my dentist called and told me he needed to extract a decayed tooth and replace it with an implant. Old age has suddenly begun staring me in the face. The inevitable has arrived at my doorstep. Things are beginning to fall apart indeed. But I am now a regular again at my local workout center, climbing mountains and trails again with vigor, but most importantly, I recently came across a few verses in Scripture which have completely changed my perspective and helped me enormously in this new phase of my life.

The Apostle Paul wrote: “That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are small and won’t last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! So we don’t look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

There are a lot of things that can daily occupy our hearts and minds, like checking the status of our financial investments, reading periodicals to make sure we are not falling behind with fashion, lowering our golf handicap to increase our confidence, running a half marathon to stay in shape, and taking online college courses to make sure we know what we are talking about at cocktail parties – just to name a few of our worrisome pursuits. However, the Scriptures are clear in saying that the most important thing we can do with our time and passions is to “fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen.” It is a beautiful truth about the Christian life – the more we focus on what cannot be seen, the more vitality and purpose we experience in the things that can be seen. This is what faith is all about. If we worship things of creation more than we do the Creator, our hearts remain restless and unfulfilled. However, if we place our trust, faith, and gaze on the Creator, we can enjoy his beautiful creation with infinite marvel, peace, and creativity.

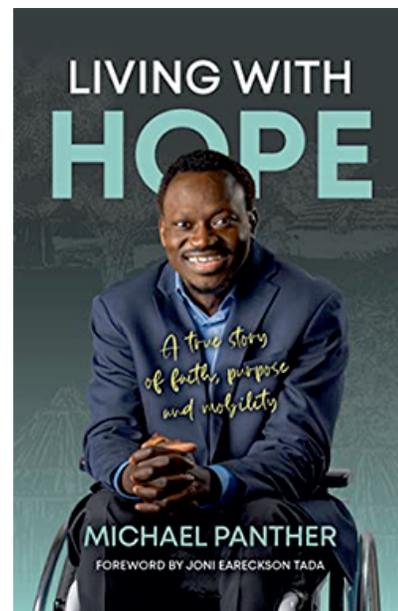
Why is it that so many families today place an inordinate emphasis on the best education for their children, positioning them for the highest possible income to live in the very best neighborhoods, or helping them excel in sports or the creative arts, but put so little emphasis on



their spiritual development? If our bodies eventually waste away, but our spirits are being renewed every day for a life eternal, why don't individuals put more energy into spiritual development and Christian education? Sadly, as each day goes by in America, fewer families are prioritizing Christian education for their children and themselves. Their eyes are fixated on what they can see.

Some people are born with genetic abnormalities or experience terrible accidents which compromise their abilities to be agile or mobile. They are asked to experience a crash course in what Paul was saying to the Corinthian church. As a result of their afflictions, they can either go down a terribly dark path of regret, anger, and fear, or they can celebrate the fact that their spirits are fully intact and capable of interacting with God's grace, joy, and love. We are all faced with this same choice, choosing faith versus fear. We can decide to prioritize things of the Spirit, making our hearts, spirits, and minds much stronger by becoming a daily follower of Christ, or we can remain fixated instead only on things of this world, chasing endlessly, tinkering, and adjusting our possessions that will never fully satisfy us.

Last fall, I was speaking at a missions' conference in Aurora, Illinois. During one session, I began talking with one of the other speakers, Michael Panther. Michael was born in the Sudan. At a very early age, he lost his ability to walk and could not use his legs. His family was forced to flee their village because of rebels taking over their territory. His family was forced to carry Michael on their backs across many miles to greater freedom, eventually making it to the United States as refugees. In the US, Michael experienced the profound privilege of receiving a motorized wheelchair, medical care, and a scholarship to a major university. He also gave his life to Christ and became a student leader with his peers. After graduation, Michael began a dynamic ministry called "Living with Hope," which provides wheelchairs for those in Africa who desperately need them. Michael often speaks and writes on behalf of



the physically disadvantaged. He has a wonderful warm spirit and smile. He told me that he, too, loves the words that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian people about fixing their eyes on Jesus. His favorite passage is, "For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands. We grow weary in our present bodies, and we long to put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing. For we will put on heavenly bodies; we will not be spirits without bodies like new clothing. While we live in these earthly bodies, we groan and sigh, but it's not that we want to die and get rid of these bodies that clothe us. Rather, we want to put on our new bodies so that these dying bodies will be swallowed up by life." (2 Corinthians 5:1-4)

Yes, we should do everything we can to care for our earthly bodies, exercise regularly, eat well, and visit doctors and dentists when needed. However, at the same time we are called to prepare our hearts for eternity by learning what the Lord requires of us by cooperating with the Holy Spirit living inside our hearts. For some day, if we remain faithful, we will be given new bodies along with a new heaven and earth when the Lord returns.

This Lenten season, which we are now enjoying, reminds us that our earthly bodies will eventually fall apart. Scripture and our church traditions tell us that “from dust we came, and to dust we return.” There is nothing we can do about it; it is just the way it is. I know some couples who set limits on how many times a day they allow each other to talk about their personal aches, pains, and even major medical setbacks. Of course, on a regular basis, they need to air their personal frustrations and feelings of deep loss and change, but they don’t want those thoughts to dominate their days and nights. Life is too precious and short for those kinds of preoccupations. They strive to discipline themselves to fix their hearts and hopes on the Lord’s kingdom, that which is largely unseen now, but which is slowly becoming more visible every day in their walk towards eternity.



Easter is a celebration of a new life which begins the moment we place our trust and faith in our Lord, Jesus Christ. As Christ was resurrected from the dead, we, too, through faith, experience resurrection from death to new life. The old is swallowed up in the new. As the Apostle Paul said, “This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

So, if things sometimes seem to be falling apart, remember the promises we find in Scripture and “fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen.” Meanwhile, my family and I wish you a blessed Easter season full of good health, joy, and hope in life everlasting.