

Faith involves the intellectual process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through experience, intuition, critical reflection and contemplation. This is what Paul implores his listeners to do when he writes:

*present your bodies as a living, holy, acceptable sacrifice to God,
your rational (not spiritual) worship; and do not be configured to this
age, but be transformed by the renewal of the intellect, so that you
may test the will of God, which is good and acceptable and
perfect.*

Faith entails the exercise of an intellect unconstrained by the fads and fashions of the moment. It is true, that faith, at its core, is a matter of trust, but who or what we trust is informed by what we believe. If we believe our well-being is found in fortune, then we will trust money to make us happy.

Isaiah (51) writes to a people who are disheartened. They anticipate major changes in the political and social order which leaves them feeling disoriented and alienated. This gives rise to anxiety and a dread of disaster looming on the horizon.

Isaiah encourages the people to remember who they are; they are the children of Abraham and Sarah, countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore. *They are to look to the rock from which they were hewn, the quarry from which they were dug.* Like Abraham and Sarah, the people are called to move into an uncertain future in faith not fear.

Faith is not optimism in the conventional sense, by which we usually mean the belief that “everything will turn out well.” We don’t know how everything will turn out and to pretend we do is a dangerous illusion. Faith does not depend on prognoses about possible outcomes.

Genuine faith is something far more profound and mysterious, and it certainly doesn’t depend on how reality appears at any given moment. Abraham and Sarah left the known for the unknown, not because the pros outweighed the cons, but because they believed the One who called them was trustworthy.

On a Sunday afternoon, June 12, 1983, Nicholas Wolterstorff received a phone call that shattered his comfortable life and divided it into before and after. The call was from his son’s landlady in Munich, Germany, where Eric was doing research for his doctoral dissertation in architectural history.

Mr. Wolterstorff, I must give you some bad news. Eric has been climbing in the mountains and he has had an accident, a serious accident. Eric is dead. You must come at once.

A rabbi friend, who participated in Eric's funeral, remarked afterward that what he had witnessed was the endurance of faith. Nicholas agreed that his faith endured, but it was a different kind and in a different kind of God. His faith became more wary, more cautious, more guarded, more qualified. He no longer trusts God to protect him and his family from harm and grief.

Nicholas, Professor of Philosophical Theology at Yale University, was hurt, baffled, disoriented. How could he fit together his son's untimely death with the God he worshiped? He knew the traditional strategies for doing so, but could not accept any of them.

Eric's death had the effect of making God more mysterious. Why not give up on God? He cannot. When he considers the stupendous immensity and astonishing intricacy of the cosmos, and the miracle of human consciousness and intelligence, he finds he cannot believe it all just happened.

It is extremely unlikely that, the Professor contends, among living beings, there would be creatures who could develop mathematics and discover that the fundamental physical laws of nature can be formulated in terms of the mathematics they have developed. "I cannot shake the conviction that God wanted creatures of just our kind."

The Professor concludes, "When I read the Gospels, I find myself believing that the Jesus of whom they speak was raised from the dead, thereby vindicating his proclamation of the coming kingdom of God. St Paul speaks for me when he says that, if Christ was not raised, our faith is in vain. I live in hope of a new day coming."

The faith that survives tragedy and enables the sufferer to survive is a rock upon which a life is built. Does it matter what kind of rock it is, if it is granite or soapstone? Does it matter what is believed? Faith builds on beliefs. To build a life on false beliefs is like building a house on sand. To build a life on truth is like building a house on granite.