

God's Love in Granite

Brian Zahnd

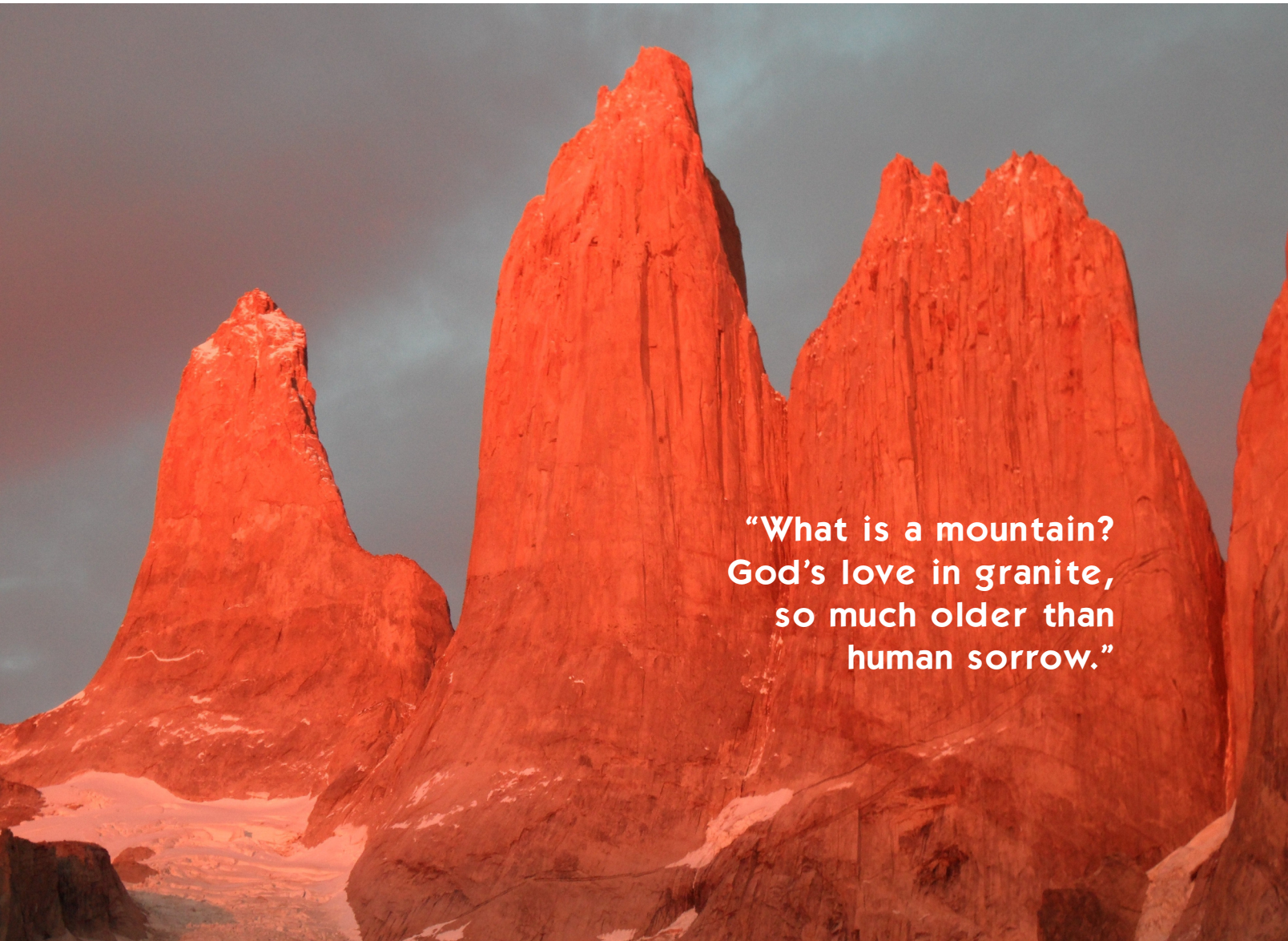
The Bible opens with a creation narrative and the constant refrain is the goodness of it all.

In the first chapter of Genesis God declares every day as good. The third day (the day life begins) is declared good twice. On the sixth day of creation we are told, "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31).

The ancient Hebrew account of the entire

goodness of creation stands in stark contrast to the pagan creation stories where the world comes into existence amidst the chaos of a great struggle between good and evil. In the rival myths of the ancient world, evil plays a role in creation. The first great revelation of the Hebrew scriptures is that the universe flows entirely from the goodness of God; evil played no part in God's good creation.

Genesis also takes us beyond where science can go. Astrophysicists can quite accurately trace the beginning of time back 13.8 billion years to the "let there be light" moment known as the Big Bang. But beyond that they cannot go. Anything prior to energy and matter (and the "time" which matter and energy create) is an impenetrable barrier for empiricism. Which is why Ludwig Wittgenstein concludes *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* by famously saying, "What



**"What is a mountain?
God's love in granite,
so much older than
human sorrow."**

we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.”

Wittgenstein understood that there can never be a purely scientific answer to this fundamental question: *Why is there something instead of nothing?* Any attempt to answer this grand question broaches upon the philosophical or, more accurately, the religious.

The great monotheistic faiths have always answered the question of why there

is something instead of nothing in the same way, the only way it can be answered: GOD. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” But why? Why did God bother? Why did God create? Why did God say, “Let there be”? The mystics have always given the same answer—because God is love, love seeking expression. From what the Cappadocian Fathers called the *perichoresis*—the eternal dance that is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—there burst forth an explosion of love. Some call it the Big Bang. Some call it Genesis. If you like we can call it the genesis of love as light and all that is.

As we learn to look at creation as goodness flowing from God’s own love, we begin to see the sacredness of all things, or as Dostoevsky and Dylan said, in every grain of sand. All of creation is a gift—a gift flowing from the self-giving love of God.

Why are there light and oceans and trees and moose and whales and every grain of sand? Because God is love—love that seeks expression in self-giving creativity. Unless we understand this we will misunderstand everything, and in our misunderstanding, we will harm creation, including our fellow image-bearing sisters and brothers. *Existence only makes sense when it is seen through the lens of love.* At the beginning of time, there is love. At the bottom of the universe, there is love.

Admittedly, freedom allows for other things too—everything from cancer cells to atomic bombs—but at the bottom of the universe, it’s love all the way down. Cancer cells and atomic bombs will not have the final word. At the end of things, there is love. When the last star burns out, God’s love will be there for whatever comes after.

In the end, it all adds up to love. So when calculating the meaning of life, if it doesn’t add up to love, go back and recalculate, because you’ve made a serious mistake. As Terrance Malick says in the *Tree of Life*, “Unless you love, your life will flash by.”

Love alone gives meaning to our fleeting fourscore sojourn. □

Brian Zahnd is a pastor in St. Joseph, Missouri. This article is an excerpt from his book, *Water to Wine*.

What is light?

God’s love in the form of photons.

What is water?

A liquid expression of God’s love.

What is a mountain?

God’s love in granite, so much older than human sorrow.

What is a tree?

God’s love growing up from the ground.



What is a bull moose?

God’s love sporting spectacular antlers.

What is a whale?

Fifty tons of God’s love swimming in the ocean.

—Brian Zahnd