



CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

"Why do you call me good?  
Only God is good."

Did Jesus Deny His Deity?  
by Brad Jersak

"Only God is Good."



**Pastoral  
Perspective:**

**"Can I do this  
faith journey  
on my own?"**

**by Greg Albrecht  
page 14**

**A**t first glance, the Gospel story of the rich young ruler seems like potent ammunition for those who believe that Jesus was nothing more than a human teacher or one of the prophets. After all, Christ himself seems to deny that he is God or even that he is good. And the difficulties only begin there.

(cont'd on p. 3)

# What Our Readers Are Saying...

Volume 10, Number 3  
June 2019  
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CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

## Skeptical No More

Greg, I have followed you and your teachings for several decades. At first I was skeptical, then I was somewhat amused and even perplexed when you talked about God's grace. Then I started to think about all the implications and permutations of grace. I believe God was working on me (and still is).

I don't believe that there is any church or ministry that is quite like yours. Your honesty, transparency and willingness to take on the really big issues—like religion for example—are so inspiring.

I am a grateful supporter of your ongoing work.

Michigan

## CWR Audio Ministry

When I listen to Greg's weekly *CWR audio* sermons and daily radio programs, I invariably find an immediate connection with my own life, my own city, the world around me and the problems we are facing. You are not a current news program—you don't pretend to interpret "world events"—but because you are absolutely focused on Jesus you bring perspective to my life.

I always finish listening with something worth pondering and you always lift me up out of the mundane into the "heavenly realms." Thank you!

Texas

## Blowing the Doors Off!

Man, I'm not knocking the evangelical tradition I was raised in, but your material is just blowing the doors off of the little blockhouses in my head! I am loving *A More Christlike God*. Thank you!

Melbourne, Australia

Brad, I mark my spiritual growth by when I first became aware of you and *A More Christlike God*. My spiritual line of demarcation runs through your work, your brilliant scholarship, your genuine kindness and your love for Jesus. My world is richer and my thirst to explore the rich spiritual heritage of our founding fathers and mothers has grown exponentially. Just wanted to say thanks, Brad.

Texas

Dear Readers,



Your generous donations enable us to share this Christ-centered gospel and to inspire others to living faith in Jesus Christ. A big thank you from all of us at CWR/PTM!

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## COVER PHOTO

Heinrich Hofmann, "Christ and the Rich Young Ruler," 1889.



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The narrative reads as follows:

<sup>18</sup> *A certain ruler asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”*

<sup>19</sup> *“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone.”* <sup>20</sup> *You know the commandments: ‘You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.’”*

<sup>21</sup> *“All these I have kept since I was a boy,” he said.*

<sup>22</sup> *When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”*

<sup>23</sup> *When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy.* <sup>24</sup> *Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup> Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”*

<sup>26</sup> *Those who heard this asked, “Who then can be saved?”*

<sup>27</sup> *Jesus replied, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.”* —Luke 18:18-27

## DIFFICULTIES

You can see that the difficulty begins when the ruler calls Jesus “good teacher” and immediately gets pushback. “Why call me good? No one is good but God.” Isn’t Christ distinguishing himself from his Father and even

claiming to be inferior to God?

That’s not all. When asked how to inherit eternal life, Jesus says, “*You know the commandments,*” and cites five of them.

Since when do we earn eternal life by obeying the Old Covenant commands? Why didn’t Jesus say, “If you believe in me, you’ll receive eternal life”?

And then when the ruler claims to have kept them all, Jesus doesn’t respond, “No, it is by grace that you are saved.” Instead, he doubles down and demands that he sell everything, distribute it to the poor and then follow him.

Is Jesus really making a vow of poverty the prerequisite for the heavenly kingdom? Unless I sell my house, my car, my assets and investments, I’m out? That doesn’t sound like good news! No wonder the man went away sad!

I have to ask, “Jesus, what got into you?”

## THE REAL PROBLEM

I propose that if we move beyond first glance to a second reading, we will discover that Jesus is not the problem. We must interpret Jesus’ difficult words as a response to the source of the problem. Namely, the ruler and his misguided question.

The consensus of early church commentators starts with the motives of this ruler. They all question his sincerity.

They see in his question a test or a trap. He’s not expecting Christ to affirm the Law but rather, hoping to tempt Jesus into saying, “Forget Moses’ teaching and follow mine.” But Jesus doesn’t fall for it. He sees through this religious ruler’s strategy.

Second, the rich ruler is a ruler, not a follower. He wields influence and holds power in the synagogue or temple. He’s not ready to leave behind his position of authority in the religious establishment to become a disciple of this itinerant rabbi.

Not only is he attached to his religious “pull”—he’s also

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deeply attached to his wealth. Jesus knew this. The man was like those monkeys who try to steal fruit from a jar and are trapped because they are too stubborn to let go of their fistful of fruit when it's too much to pull through the opening.

In Matthew's Gospel, Christ adds to the five commandments, *"Love your neighbor as yourself."* This man was too attached to his holdings to obey the fullness of that Law.

While he loved his power and his pocketbook, a bigger impediment yet remained, preventing him from following Jesus. He takes pride in his own goodness, claiming to have fulfilled the whole of the Law without fail from childhood. His question, sometimes translated, *"What*

**"Blessed is the man who knows his own weakness, for this knowledge becomes for him the foundation, the root and the beginning of goodness."**

**—Isaac the Syrian**

*GOOD thing must I do to inherit eternal life,"* assumes that he has already done every good thing required under the Law and therefore, has already qualified for the Kingdom of God.

The assumption behind his pride is that this is how eternal life works: he thinks it's a transaction—something you can buy or earn with good behavior. It is the rich man, not Jesus, who introduces that error. Jesus must subvert that whole line of thinking in his answer.

## THE REAL SOLUTION

Christ's assertion just prior to the rich ruler's question exposes the man's entire transactional religion in one sentence: *"Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."* (Luke 18:17)

Jesus has just said, "You don't earn the kingdom with your power, wealth or goodness. **Eternal life is not purchased—it is received as pure gift, as if by open-handed children or empty-handed beggars.** It is not earned by spiritual wealth and health, but received freely by those poor in spirit and in need of the Great Physician."

In other words, *Salvation comes by grace or not at all!* The rich ruler had missed that crucial point.

Jesus summarizes the exchange by reflecting on how hard it is for the rich (materially or spiritually) to enter God's kingdom. Why? Because they think they can earn it. Indeed, for anyone to gain the kingdom by human merit is impossible. *"But,"* he says, *"for God, all things are possible."* Meaning?

We don't tear our way through the veil into the Holy of Holies. Christ alone could tear down the veil through his own crucified body. We don't buy our way out of death and push our way past the angel with the flaming sword back into Paradise. Christ alone had to open heaven's gates from the inside through his resurrection from the tomb.

Christ alone is that good. Christ alone is that God.

When Jesus asked, *"Why do you call me good? God alone is good,"* he wasn't denying his deity at all. He was prompting the man to answer, *"Who do you say that I am?"*

He didn't send the man away sad because he was too rich for heaven. The man left because he could not recognize the One in front of him. Had he believed Jesus was truly the Messiah, all the power, wealth and goodness in the world would have meant nothing to him. He would have followed immediately, as Jesus' disciples had (see verse 28–29).

## CHIEF OF SINNERS

For centuries, Christians have read this story alongside Paul's words to Timothy:

*Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.* (1 Timothy 1:15–16)

Paul, that zealous keeper of the Law, saw what the rich ruler did not: Christ did not to save law-keeping Jews or moralistic Christians. He didn't come for the "good." Christ came for "sinners, of whom I am chief." He didn't come for the "worthy,"

## George MacDonald On Jesus and his Abba

but for those in need of mercy. We don't make ourselves worthy—Christ makes us worthy. And while Christ loves everyone and turns from no one, the sad truth is that those who consider themselves more “woke” and worthy are sorely tempted to turn from Christ. But those who are most aware of their need for mercy seem most open and truly awakened to Christ, our infinite source of unflinching grace.

Isaac the Syrian put it this way: “Blessed is the man who knows his own weakness, for this knowledge becomes for him the foundation, the root and the beginning of goodness.”

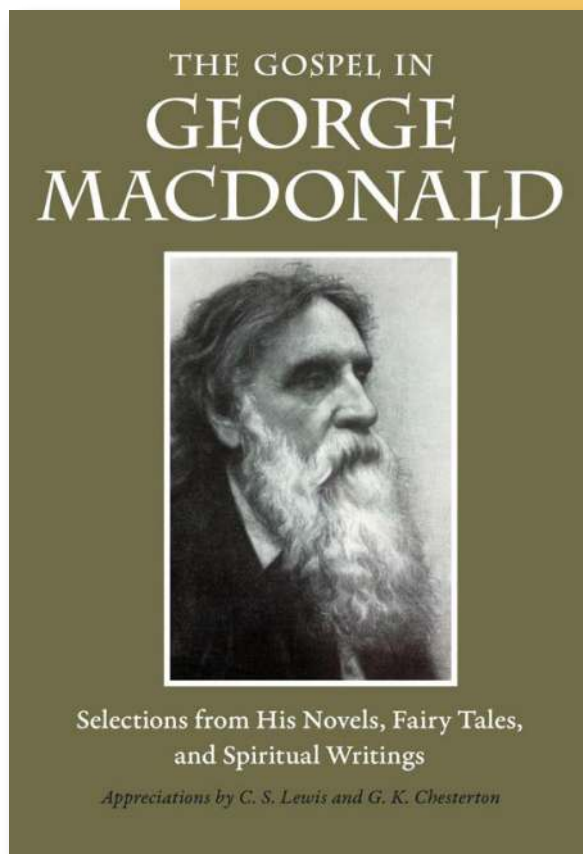
So it is not “unto ourselves” that we depend for eternal life, but “*Unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.*” (1 Timothy 1:17).

I would like to end by answering Jesus' question: “**Why do you call me good? Only God is good.**”

Answer: “Exactly. I call you good because I believe you and the only good God, your Father, are one and the same.” □

*Brad Jersak is the author of A More Christlike God (CWR Press) and its soon to be published sequel, A More Christlike Way.*

What Jesus did was what the Father is always doing; the suffering he endured was that of the Father from the foundation of the world, reaching its climax in the person of his Son. God provides the sacrifice; the sacrifice is himself. He is always, and has ever been, sacrificing himself to and for his creatures. It lies in the very essence of his creation of them. The worst heresy...is to divide the Father from the Son—in thought or feeling or action or intent; to represent the Son as doing that which the Father does not himself do. Jesus did nothing but what the Father did and does. If Jesus suffered for men, it was because his Father suffers for men; only he came close to men through his body and their senses, that he might bring their spirits close to his Father and their Father, so giving them life, and losing what could be lost of his own. He is God our Saviour: it is because God is our Saviour that Jesus is our Saviour. The God and Father of Jesus Christ could never possibly be satisfied with less than giving himself to his own!



The unbeliever may easily imagine a better God than the common theology of the country offers him; but not the lovingest heart that ever beat can even reflect the length and breadth and depth and height of that love of God which shows itself in his Son—one, and of one mind, with himself. The whole history is a divine agony to give divine life to creatures. The outcome of that agony, the victory of that creative and again creative energy, will be radiant life, whereof joy unspeakable is the flower. Every child will look in the eyes of the Father, and the eyes of the Father will receive the child with an infinite embrace. □

*Excerpt from The Gospel in George MacDonald (Plough Publishing House, 2016).*





# DON'T MISS OUT ON YOUR REAL FATHER

STEVE BROWN

**M**y father was a drunk. He was an executive (head of shipping) at a large textile firm with plants in Tennessee, North Carolina and Holland. He was also an amateur pool hustler who hustled the hustlers who came through our town. He would get a call from the pool hall that there was a new “gun” in town. My father would leave the office, go to the pool hall and, to the surprise of the hustler, leave the pool hall with considerably more cash than he had when he first came in.

“Your daddy,” a man told me once, “was the best pool player in western North Carolina—when he was sober.” I asked the man who was the second-best pool player. He laughed and said, “Your father when he was drunk.”

You may be thinking that my growing up years must have been horrible. Actually, you would be wrong. Do you know why? Because my father loved my brother and me with a passionate, unconditional, unrelenting, undeserved and unreserved love.

I wish I had the space to tell you stories; but whether it was defending us against unjust charges, standing with us when we were “guilty

as charged,” or showing our pictures to anybody who would look, his love and commitment to us was total.

At his funeral, there was a long receiving line and repeatedly, as people shook our hands, they said, “Do you boys know how much your father loved you?”

Years later when I became a Christian, I was reading the Bible (a book with which I was not yet that familiar) and I came across a passage where Jesus said,

*“Which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him?”* —Matthew 7:9-11

I remember the incredible joy with which I received Jesus’ words. I remember thinking that if my heavenly Father loved me just one-fifth as much as my earthly father, I was “good to go.” I never had to worry again about my being good enough to please him (he was already pleased because I was his son). I didn’t have to worry about my guilt

(he knew the bad things about me and loved me anyway). I could trust him with anything (his love would never allow him to be unmerciful, unkind or angry because I had offended him). In short, both my earthly father and my heavenly Father would never say, "I've had it with you."

A lot of years have passed. I thought I would be better than I am now, but I'm not. I thought I would eventually get to the place where I would be good enough to get my heavenly Father to love me, but it hasn't worked out that way. I thought my knowledge would please him and make him glad he made me his child, but every day in one way or another, I find out I got it all wrong. But God is my Father and it's okay. He, like my earthly one, never wavers in doing what good fathers do. He never changed and his Fatherhood—his love, mercy, grace and gentle discipline has been the most important and constant factor in my life.

I remember first reading the words of Jesus about the nature of a Father who "gives good things" to his children. As I read, I was overwhelmed again by a heavenly Father who revealed himself to us in Jesus. I found myself sometimes moved to tears and sometimes laughing the laughter of the free and loved.

Since then, I've thought a lot about both of my fathers. Shortly before his death, my father was in the care of a physician at a Seventh-Day Adventist hospital. The doctor said, "Mr. Brown, you have about three months to live. We're going to pray and then I'm going to tell you something far more important than what I just told you." He then led my father to Jesus Christ.

Do you know why it took my father so long to come to Christ? He didn't think he was good enough. My father would come to church only if we boys were in a children's presentation or occasionally for a church supper. But by and large, he stayed away from church. I never heard my father say bad things about church people or refer to them as "hypocrites" or such. He just didn't think he fit because he wasn't good enough to fit.

How in the world could my father get the

"main thing" about the Christian faith so wrong? I've asked myself that a thousand times. Didn't he listen? Was it that we just didn't say it right? Or maybe, do you think, we somehow got it wrong ourselves? Maybe we bought into the lie that the church is made up of good people (or at least "better people") whose main calling is to help others be as good as us.

For whatever reason, very early on in my ministry, I became passionate about telling people (saying it in a way that they could hear and understand) of a heavenly Father who loved sinners so much that he sent his Son to die for them. I've been driven to tell people that no matter who they are, what they've done, what they're smoking or drinking, who they're sleeping with or who they've hurt—they could come to Him.

I know. Some of you haven't had my experience with your earthly father. Almost every day I hear from people whose fathers were physically, verbally or sexually abusive, demanding, condemning and angry...fathers who could never be pleased no matter what. When I start talking about "fathers" you may wince. I get that, and I "taste the salt of your tears."

But don't miss out on your real Father. The very fact that there are bad fathers and we know it references a "knowing" that fathers aren't

*"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him?" —Matthew 7:9-11*

supposed to be like that. Somewhere there is a Father who is different—kind and gentle—a father who loves you not because of what you do or don't do, but simply because you are his son or daughter.

The angry among us will say, "Okay, God is your Father, but don't let it go to your head." Don't you believe them! God is your Father, so let it go to your head as much as you want. Laugh, dance, sing and be glad. ☐

*Steve Brown is the founder of Key Life Network and Key Life radio program.*

# Magic Genie or Heavenly Father?

Felicia Murrell

I'm not sure if people realize that coercing others to Jesus by praying prayers that essentially sick the devil on

people to lead them back to God only creates bitter Christians who are motivated into a religion by fear of punishment.

God never wanted to be Jesus-the-Magic-Genie who would erase trouble from our existence (cf. John 16:33). And he doesn't need to use sickness, accidents, chaos or any other form of destruction to bring people to him. If you stop and think

about it, what's appealing about a God like that anyway?

You have a very REAL heavenly Father who loves you. His love is enough to woo you. It is his loving-kindness, his goodness that draws men to think differently about him.

When we rightly represent who God is, we lead people to a God of love who is passionate about people; a God who wants to embrace each person—a God who wants to enter into a relationship with you.

He's no three-wish Genie but he's the One I want with me in the highs and the lows; the thrills and the mundane because I can trust his love for me. How do I know this?

I certainly didn't learn it from orphan-spirited Christianity. I know because he pursued me with his kind intentions and comforted me with His love. Because he first loved me, it compels me into relationship with him.

Don't be fooled. Love doesn't look like punishment. There is no sickness or accidents, chaos or destruction in love. These things are not "acts of God."

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil has convinced us that people need to be punished in order to do better. It's time to uproot this tree and all its fallacies from our thinking. □

*Felicia Murrell is the author of Truth Encounters, a journey into the heart of Father God.*

I HAVE TOLD YOU THESE THINGS,  
SO THAT IN ME  
YOU MAY HAVE PEACE.  
IN THIS WORLD  
YOU WILL  
HAVE TROUBLE.  
BUT TAKE HEART!  
I HAVE OVERCOME  
THE WORLD

JOHN 16:33



# Praying Into the Abyss of Despair

Stephen Crosby

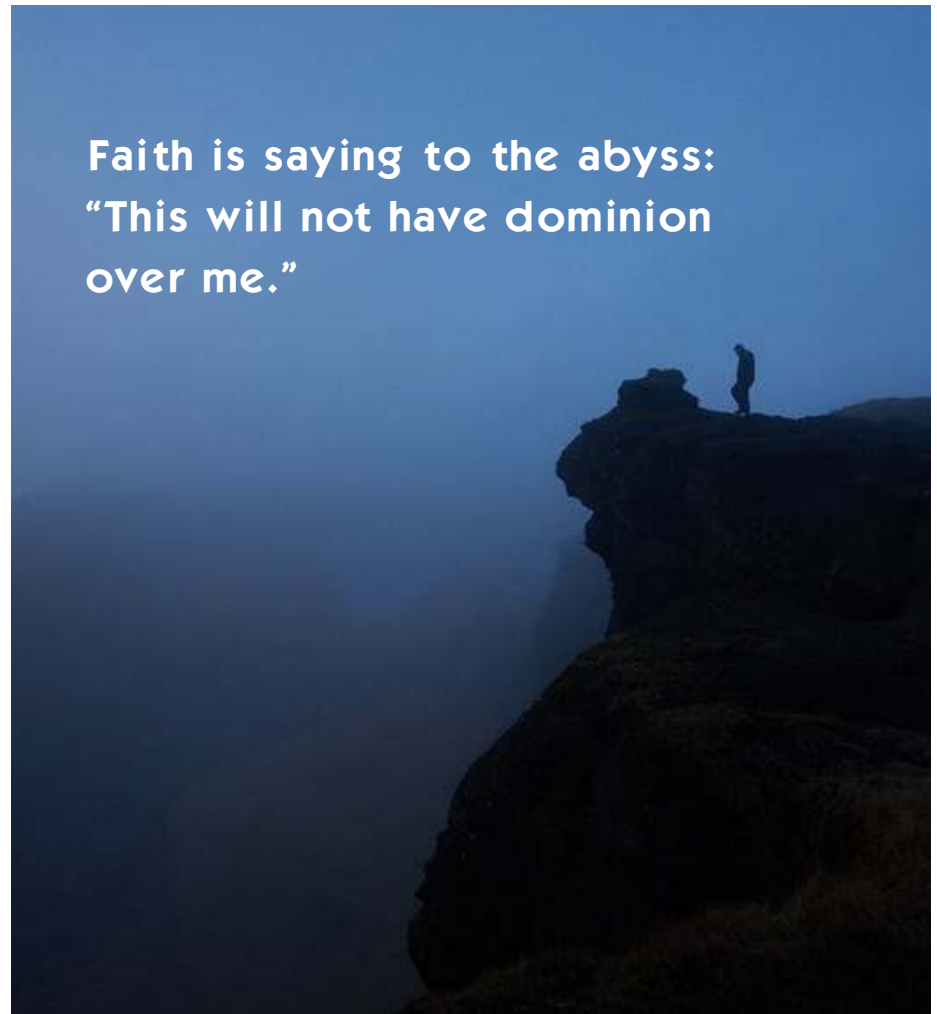
Sometimes circumstances make us feel like we are standing on the edge of a dark and bottomless abyss of hopelessness. We pray, do all the things we know to do, have been told to do, trained to do (and then some) and nothing changes or things get worse.

Cliché Christian answers and the insensitivities of cheap, canned theology of fellow Christians don't help. Rather than identify with us in the darkness of the mystery of our circumstances, people who sound like "Job's comforters" heap guilt, shame, introspection, fear, and anxiety upon us with: "There must be sin in your life" or "You just don't have enough faith," or this would not be happening to you. **Both are lies.**

## PRAYER TAKES COURAGE

Prayer is an activity that takes a lot of courage.

Sometimes the essence of prayer is trusting God so that it may seem we are in voluntary freefall, descending into the abyss of our hopelessness. We have no sensory assurance of anything other than darkness. We can't stay on the edge any longer, and what is in front of



us is nothing but darkness and despair.

Those who choose to trust someone other than God turn from the precipice, give up on prayer and accommodate their present reality. Those who believe will (in trust and faith) throw themselves, heart and soul, into the abyss.

Once those who trust in God

do so, they discover that fearful freefall turns into flight when God puts his wind beneath their wings. Those who refuse to face the abyss of their hopelessness can never know the experience of having freefall turn to flight by God the Holy Spirit.

Ezekiel spoke of waters where we can no longer touch solid

ground—waters so deep that we cannot control anything, even our own survival. Those who insist on the security of the shoreline, where everything is safely neat, predictable, understandable, and manageable, will never know the dynamic of the real prayer of faith.

Father God appreciates the “faith” of those who, in the face of their impossibility and no answers, throw themselves into it anyway. It’s corny and clichéd, but he appreciates it in ways that we cannot truly fathom.

There is an intimacy with the Father, and a fraternity with the Son and a unity of the Spirit that can only be subjectively

experienced when we have stared at the darkness and thrown ourselves in. It is what Jesus did at Calvary and in the grave, facing it, going there willingly. Until resurrection morning, all is darkness, and we can’t change reality by pretending there’s no darkness. For the children of Israel, the last minute of the last hour, of the last day of the 39th year of wilderness wanderings looked exactly like every day that had preceded it—but then . . . resurrection dawn.

I get discouraged as much as

anyone, but somehow, if I must fall, I have learned to fall forward, or more recently, “fall in.”

If you are struggling, or seem to have no strength—or if the thought of engaging in prayer excites you as much as a toothache—don’t give up. Don’t let a lack of results deter you.

Faith is more than getting results/answers. Faith is saying to the abyss: “This will not have dominion over me, and if I

that the buoyancy of faith doesn’t have to be mine! When I am weak, the faith of others, who love me and with whom I am in relationship, taken and animated by the Spirit of God, becomes: the air beneath my wings! My only job is to jump into the abyss, trusting God. *My contribution of faith is to admit that I don’t have any!*

Then, “in faith” I throw myself in! This is overcoming prayer. This is overcoming faith.

This is faith that stares death in the eyes and prevails.

If God has given me strength, or favor and prosperity rather than adversity, it is my moral duty to my brothers, sisters, and the world to enter into their suffering and

impossibility, and share my faith when they have none. I sincerely pray that I will be able to live the rest of my days in this way. I pray

every day:

“Lord, you have given me life and strength and health, please, let my life amount to something today for your purposes in your saints. May my existence be more than the delusions of American cultural priorities of self-interest.” □

*Stephen Crosby is director of Stephanos Ministries. [www.swordofthekingdom.com](http://www.swordofthekingdom.com).*



***The great mystery of freefall into the abyss is discovering that the buoyancy of faith doesn't have to be mine!***

must perish, I will, but I will throw myself and my hopelessness right into believing and trusting in God.”

In doing so, my only hope will be God taking my freefall and turning it into flight where it is his supernatural resurrection life . . . or it is nothing.

The great mystery of freefall into the abyss is discovering

# God's Love in Granite

Brian Zahnd

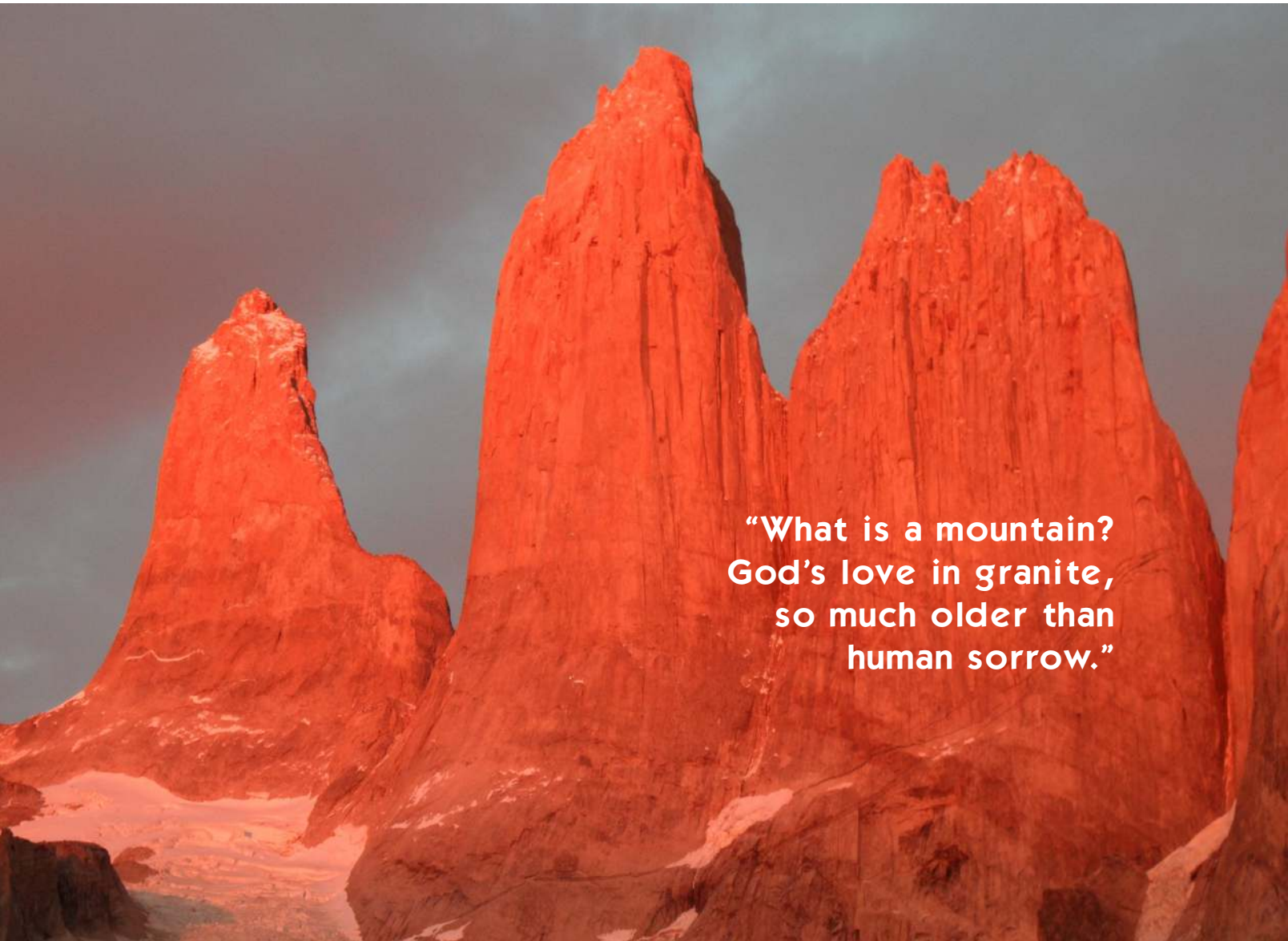
The Bible opens with a creation narrative and the constant refrain is the goodness of it all.

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.*



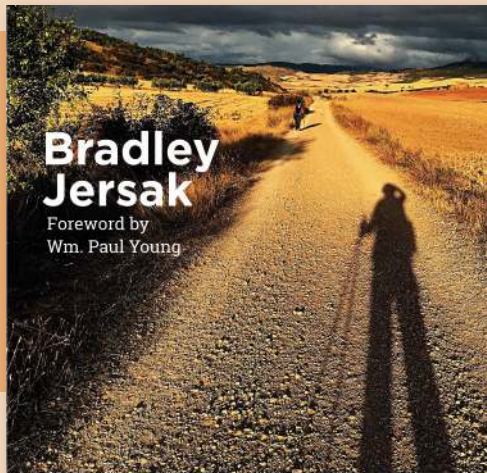
**What is a bull moose?**

*God’s love sporting spectacular antlers.*

**What is a whale?**

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

—Brian Zahnd



**A MORE CHRISTLIKE WAY**  
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Two of the questions Brad will ask in *AMCW* are addressed by John Wesley, the 18th century evangelist.

### JOHN WESLEY — “On Faith”

**Q: Can people turn to the Light of Christ and follow him without knowing his Name?**

**Wesley:** “A divine conviction of God, and the things of God, as, even in its infant state, enables everyone that possesses it to fear God and work righteousness. Whosoever, in every nation, believes thus far, the Apostle [Peter] declares is accepted.”

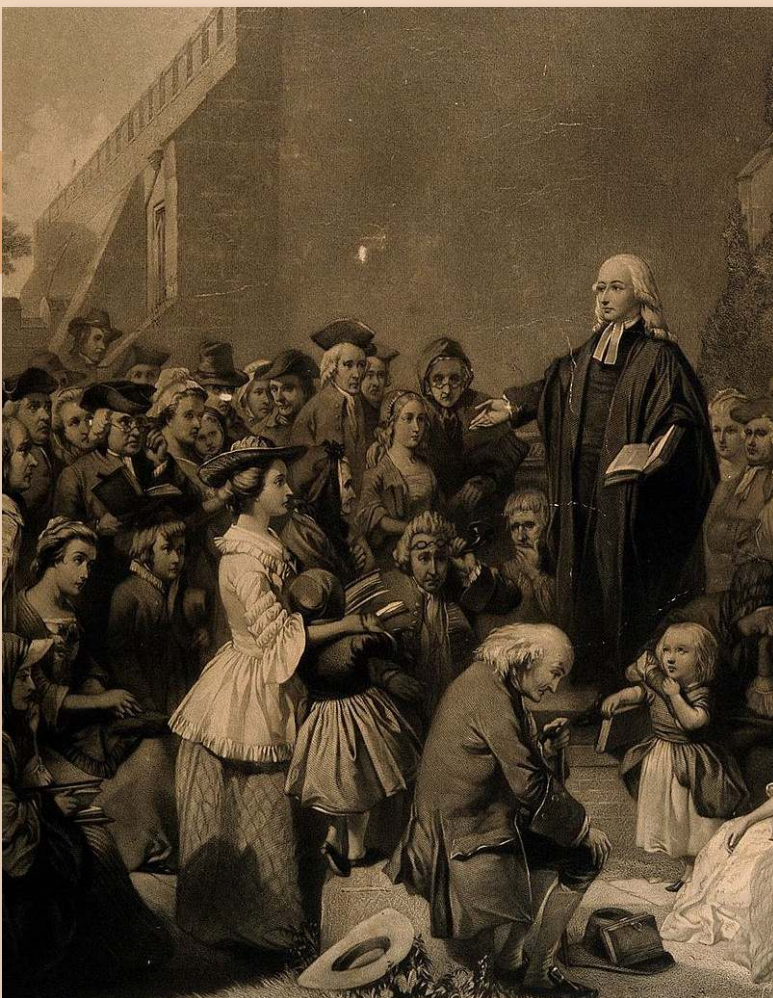
**Q: If they can be accepted, what is the advantage of knowing the Name?**

**Wesley:**

1. In knowing the Name we enjoy the full benefits of the redeemed life. In the name of Christ, we come to know the name of God [*Abba*], and can relate to God as our Father—not as servants but as his sons and daughters.
2. In knowing the Name, we enjoy the full assurance of our salvation on the basis of what Christ has done.



**Engraving:** After he was forbidden from preaching from the pulpits of parish churches, Wesley began open-air preaching in the streets and fields.







GREG ALBRECHT

*“Can I do this faith journey on my own?”*

**Q**uestion from a reader: Just over three years ago, I finally realized that the reason I could not find a spiritual home was not my supposed rebellion but that I was seeing through the sham of religion.

My query is this: can I do this faith journey on my own? I am 73 years old and live alone. I have a precious, close relationship with God, but I feel guilty for not being “in fellowship.” The thought of church makes me physically ill (there is a very serious reason for that reaction).

Greg’s book, *Rejecting Religion—Embracing Grace* has helped me to work through many issues that came with the realization I had been well and truly duped by fundamental evangelicalism. It’s been a huge journey!

**R**esponse from Greg: While religious traditions, buildings, rituals and ceremonies are not necessary in the life of a Christ-follower, loving God and loving neighbor are central products of the life of our risen Lord—products of the love he lives in

us. We are not alone because Christ is in us, and his life in us will spread his light into the lives of others. Others we positively affect are those most naturally in our lives—as common as people we meet shopping, at doctor’s offices, commuting to and from destinations, etc. Our Christ-centered dispositions then lead us to exude his love—to be kind, gentle and patient. While such a Spirit-led life does not guarantee deep and lasting friendships, it will produce relationship at some level—as simple as having a cup of tea with another. Your faith journey may then be shared with others informally, with or without the benefit of an organization. You may share your faith in a variety of ways—we speak of this mutuality as fellowship. If you never attend or join a brick-and-mortar church again, you might still find, share and give such fellowship through joining and serving a charitable group or volunteer work to help others.

**R**eaders’ reply: Your words certainly resonate with this journey I am on.

When I say “living alone” I must add that I live in what is called here an “over-50s active lifestyle resort,” a community of about 200 people within a small semi-rural community. Since moving here about 20 months ago, I have sought out residents who claim to be “Christian.” What an interesting exercise! None of them want to move from their particular brand, so each remains separate. Given your comments on how I can express God’s love and acceptance of all people, I now understand why I can relate to each of them, regardless of their brand, including those who have no desire for God. I relate as a follower of Jesus. Here in my community, I also have the privilege of being the editor of our monthly newsletter—through which I have been sharing God’s love and joy as much as appropriately possible for a diverse group. The response has been positive and it has been encouraging to have meaningful conversations with many people about tough times they face and their understanding of God.

As part of my “coming out” from fundamental evangelicalism, I have become



much more relaxed in talking with those who give little thought to God—the “wretched sinners” we used to avoid like the plague unless we planned to convert them to Jesus. But those people are far more respectful and accepting of me than those with whom I’ve tried so hard to connect within churches. They are open in their conversations with me. God has been working with me in ways I had not known, in keeping with his promise that he knows what he is doing with me. After chatting the other night with a few people from a club, I was concerned about mixing with those so far removed from church.

But that was exactly what Jesus did, and he was accused of being a glutton and drunkard, friend of sinners (Matthew 11:18-19), and he went on doing just what he was doing.

My question has always been, “How can all of us, in and out of the church, come to know Jesus if we’re afraid to talk about him?”

**R**esponse from Greg: I am thankful to read your thoughts about how the light of Christ may shine in and through you to others who do not consider themselves “Christian.”

As you know, sometimes such folks are much

easier to talk with since they do not have “as many barnacles on their boat.” Jesus presents counter-intuitive ways of serving him, ways we don’t even notice as formal moments of sharing or teaching, but as our normal day-to-day way of life—indeed, the *Jesus Way*. We live out this way of life—our life in Christ—because Jesus regards all men and women as brothers and sisters, not only those who attend worship services in a church building or pray a certain way.

We love the world because God loves the world (John 3:16).

Of course, that means we love both those who attend formal church services and those who don’t, those who identify as Christians and those who do not. We love all because to do any less is, by definition, not following Jesus.

The Church is not a building to which we travel but the life of Christ, the hope of glory, shared in mutual love. By God’s grace, we are, together, the body of Christ, loving all, as we can, where we can, without discretion or exclusion. □

*Among Greg Albrecht’s leadership roles at Plain Truth Ministries, he is passionate about responding as a pastor to those who journey with us.*

“WHY DOES HE  
EAT WITH TAX  
COLLECTORS  
AND  
SINNERS?”  
MARK 2:16

Art by Sieger Koder





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**Irresistible and Inescapable Love**

—Week of June 2

**Failure is Inevitable but Never Final**

—Week of June 9

**Love and Marriage**

—Week of June 16

**Junk Yard Dogs**

—Week of June 23

**Are You Really Free?**

—Week of June 30

### July 2019

**No Matter How Hard You Try**

—Week of July 7

**Believe, Belong, Become**

—Week of July 14

**Who is God and What is God Like?**

—Week of July 21

**Lean on Me**

—Week of July 28

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