

What people are saying about ...

FROM ETERNITY TO HERE

“*From Eternity to Here* is a masterpiece. A must read for those who believe and for others who want to believe. It reads like a movie on paper.”

Dr. Myles Munroe, pastor and author of
Rediscovering the Kingdom and *God’s Big Idea*

Too often we see people react to what they don’t like about the church. In *From Eternity to Here*, Frank Viola offers up the doctrine that causes him to act on behalf of the church. Make no doubt about it—Frank is a provocateur and an artist—and both come through in this book. Frank continues to challenge the church-at-large with a powerful mind, an impassioned voice, and a love for the bride of Christ. You need to get this book and wrestle with Frank through the biblical passages regarding our identity in Christ as His body and the mission our God has entrusted to us.

Ed Stetzer, author of *Breaking the Missional Code*, www.edstetzer.com

“In *From Eternity to Here*, Viola shows us that we’ve settled for dry doctrines and rote religious behavior when what God wants—and what God has always wanted—is to engage us in a passionate love story that will never end. As Viola unfolds the glorious story of God’s quest for a bride, readers will find their imaginations inspired and their lives transformed. The sheer beauty of God’s magnificent plan compels our allegiance and revolutionizes our lives. This retelling of the ‘old, old story’ is a much-needed gift to the church today.”

Greg Boyd, pastor, theologian, and *author* of *Letters from a Skeptic*, *Myth of a Christian Nation*, and *God at War*

PART ONE
**A FORGOTTEN WOMAN:
THE BRIDE OF CHRIST**

“Of all the sticks of TNT that Frank Viola has launched into a sleepy, status-quo church, this grenade has the most explosive potential to make the church unashamed of the gospel and to release God’s dynamic power for salvation.”

Leonard Sweet, Drew University, George Fox University, www.sermons.com

“Viola artfully weaves his own story into the drama of redemptive embrace, making God’s love both a deeply personal affair as well as something of an existential quest in which we all have a part to play. As such it is ‘the old, old story’ retold for a new and contemporary audience. It is a great work of narrative theology made very accessible for any reader.”

Alan Hirsch, missional strategist and author of *The Forgotten Ways*

“Some books are meant to be read and shelved but that’s not true of the classics. Books become classics when they speak to new generations who were not even born when they were written. *From Eternity to Here* is a book for this hour, without a doubt. But it will be a classic for generations to come. This book has captured truth in simple language that speaks to the heart, not just the head.”

Dr. Ralph W. Neighbour, author of *Where Do We Go From Here?*

“This poetic exposé by Frank Viola is indeed a masterful work of art—a modern-day mystical classic for sure. It is with a burning heart that I commend to you *From Eternity to Here*.”

Dr. James W. Goll, author of *The Lost Art of Practicing His Presence*

“Frank Viola is the heir apparent to classic deeper Christian life teachers, faithfully bringing their core ideas into the twenty-first century with his own fresh insight. *Visio Dei* (the face of God) meets *Missio Dei* (the mission of God) in this passionate examination of what motivates the very heart of God!

Mike Morrell, graduate fellow in emergent studies,
MA in strategic foresight at Regent University

“I have read just about everything Frank Viola has written, and his passion for seeing people experience vintage Christianity is contagious. This book brings you creatively into the biblical story by immersing your heart and mind in the great adventure of what God has for our life.”

Dan Kimball, pastor and author of *The Emerging Church* and *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*

“I couldn’t put this book down. Viola does an exceptional job of unpacking metaphors and connecting biblical threads that deal with Christ and the church. From Genesis to Revelation, Viola pulls together the sacred plans that God unveils for the bride of Christ. Pushing in full force the concrete elements and literary connections of Christ and the church—the piece de resistance of the biblical narrative—Viola makes a substantial plea for the church to live in its true identity.”

Brian Orme, pastor, editor, and freelance journalist

“*From Eternity to Here* takes you on a guided tour of the Bible, tracing three interwoven storylines from Genesis to Revelation. It will help new readers of the Bible get the big picture, and it will help seasoned Christians remember what really matters.”

Brian McLaren, author and activist

“Frank sidesteps the maze of ecclesiastic labels to get to the heart of what church really is and how God sees it. Using the biblical metaphors of church and fleshing them out with the whole sweep of Scripture, Frank gives us fresh insight into the church as bride of Christ, house of God, body of Christ, and the family of God. I feel Frank’s unique contribution has to do with passion and romance, elements of God’s intention with his people. This is often missing in ‘missional’ books written by men unhealthily driven by purposeful objectives. Frank reminds us that the church is glamorous, and God is concerned with more than just getting the job done.”

Andrew Jones, missional cell developer for Church Mission Society, tallskinnykiwi.com

“*From Eternity to Here* reveals the startling but simple fact that God has already accomplished His ultimate goal in the resurrected Christ. We are the focus of His passionate love, and we have received the capacity to love Him in return forever—for free, a gift that will never be taken back.”

Don Francisco, singer and songwriter

“Here is a book that lets you hear the ancient whisper of the God that “so loved the world,” a whisper that has often been hard to hear amid all the noise, clutter, and meanness of Christendom. Listen and hear of a God who loves humanity so much that He can’t help but enter the mess we’ve made of the world and help us reimagine it.

Shane Claiborne, author, activist, and recovering sinner, www.thesimpleway.org

“I appreciate this message so much. It is a very clear articulation of the subject and will press folks to that one thing I hold most necessary: daily fellowship.”

DeVern Fromke, teacher and author of *Ultimate Intention* and *Unto Full Stature*

“Frank has hit the mark by unfolding to us the true foundations of faith-filled living. God has always designed us for a relational journey of being rather than to doing. He did not create religion, but a people who would walk in His supernatural presence rather than lifeless doctrinal divisions. I recommend this book to anyone who wants to escape the systematic matrix of today, and live in the reality of Christ’s glorious kingdom.”

Robert Ricciardelli, founder of Visionary Advancement Strategies

**FROM
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FRANK VIOLA

REDISCOVERING THE AGELESS PURPOSE OF GOD

FROM ETERNITY TO HERE

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INTRODUCTION

DISCLOSING THE DIVINE STORY

In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.

—Ephesians 3:4–5

What I will share in the pages that follow are three narratives, which woven together, tell the epic story of God's ageless purpose. All three narratives are solidly grounded in Scripture. In fact, they embody the whole story of Scripture, streaming through it like a constant current.

The first is the story of a God who is an ageless romantic, driven by one consuming pursuit. The second is about a God who has sought since eternity to have a resting place, a habitation, a home. And the third reveals a God from another realm who visits planet earth to establish a heavenly colony that will give Him visible expression.

In the economy of Scripture, 1 + 1 + 1 does not equal 3, but 1. The story of God's ageless purpose is one grand drama.

Woven together, these three narratives embody “God’s story,” the sweeping drama of God’s timeless plan in the earth, the great interpretive narrative by which we may better understand the Bible, the Christian life, and our world.

For most of us, life spins on with few breaks or transitions. This book is designed to help put on the brakes and navigate you through a terribly important question: *What is my purpose and my passion? And how does it map to God’s?*

From the book of Ephesians, we know that the triune God is chiefly occupied with the following:

- a house and a family for God the Father (Eph. 2:19–22).
- a bride and a body for God the Son (Eph. 5:25–32; 1:22–23; 2:15–16; 3:6).

The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father (John 15:26). As such, He is the life of God Himself (Rom. 8:2, 9). More precisely, the Spirit is the bond of love that flows like liquid passion within the communion of the triune God (Rom. 5:5; 15:30; 2 Cor. 13:14). Consequently, the Spirit shares the house, the family, the bride, and the body along with the Father and the Son.

Part 1 of this book is dedicated to presenting the bride. Part 2 is dedicated to presenting the house. Part 3 is dedicated to presenting the body and the family. Interestingly, all of these images are different aspects of one reality. Taken together, they embody God’s grand mission in the earth.

This progression is also rooted in Scripture. And it is the heart of the biblical story, the metanarrative (overarching story) of holy

writ. The Father obtains a bride for His Son by the Spirit. He then builds a house in which He, the Son, and the bride dwell together in the Spirit. The Father, the Son, and the bride live in that house as an extended household and they have offspring by the Spirit. The offspring constitutes a family, a new humanity called “the body of Christ.”

If you have been a Christian for any length of time, terms like “bride of Christ,” “body of Christ,” “house of God,” and “family of God” are all too familiar to you. They may even be worn out and tiresome. It’s not an overstatement to say that our wearied familiarity with these words has blunted their edge and diluted their impact.

Christians have been given a steady diet of biblical terminology. We speak it fluently because it’s the tribal language. But the reality and the power behind our terminology has largely been lost.

My hope, therefore, is that as you read this book, new life will be breathed into these familiar terms. I pray that the Holy Spirit would fill them with their original beauty and awe to this end: that you would be given a dramatically new, if not a staggering, look at the ageless purpose that drives your God. For that purpose is the very why reason you exist.

According to the purpose of the ages, which he [the Father] purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

—Paul of Tarsus in Ephesians 3:11 (Darby)

Neither revolution nor reformation can ultimately change a society, rather you must tell a new powerful tale, one so persuasive that it sweeps away the old myths and becomes the preferred story, one so inclusive that it gathers all the bits of our past and our present into a coherent whole, one that even shines some light into the future so that we can take the next step.... If you want to change a society, then you have to tell an alternative story.

—Ivan Illich, Austrian philosopher

CHAPTER 1

THE HIDDEN ROMANCE OF THE BIBLE

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know.

—*Ephesians 1:18 NASB*

Before the beginning, she was there. She is the most elegant woman in the universe. She is as ancient as God. She existed before angels. Her origins reach further back than antiquity itself. Yet she is forever young.

The word *stunning* fails to adequately describe her. She is as beautiful as the face of God. She is beyond captivating. She is hypnotic and magnetic. Most of us have never imagined the glory that she carries. Just a glimpse of her matchless beauty could win your heart and possess your being. She is incurably attractive.

This woman defines *liberty*; she embodies *freedom*. And she was made for love.

She stands at the very heartbeat of God's eternal purpose. She is His highest passion. His holy obsession, even. She is the

purpose of the very creation wherein you and I stand. And your Lord is out-of-His-head in love with her.

Yet despite her beauty, she has been utterly neglected. She has been forgotten. And with rare exception, she has been veiled to most of us. Herein lies my motive in writing the first section of this book: *to give her center stage.*

God's Ultimate Passion

From the beginning, God has had a secret. Before time, the Almighty shrouded His high and holy purpose in a mystery. And He hid it in His Son. For ages, no one knew what that purpose was. It was deeply hidden in God. It was a secret—the secret of the ages (Rom. 16:25; Col. 1:26; Eph. 3:4–5, 9).

Adam walked with God, yet he didn't know the mystery. Abraham was the friend of God, yet he didn't know the mystery. Moses was the prophet of God, yet he didn't know the mystery. Neither did David, Isaiah, nor Jeremiah.

The mystery was not only veiled to mortals, it was hidden from angels as well. Gabriel and Michael didn't know it. Neither did Lucifer, nor his demonic hosts (1 Cor. 2:7–8; Eph. 3:9–10).

Why did God keep His purpose a secret for so long? Presumably because He didn't want His purpose to be thwarted prematurely. God's purpose embodies His dream, His passion, His very heartbeat. So He kept it veiled until the time became full.

Old Testament authors first proclaimed the sacred mystery in stories, types, pictures, and shadows. But although kings, prophets, and sages proclaimed it, they did not understand it.

And then one day, it happened. God pulled back the curtain and

revealed the secret. He chose a man named Paul of Tarsus to unveil it to the world (Col. 1:25–29; Eph. 3:1–11). In Paul’s letters, especially Ephesians and Colossians, the apostle speaks of this mystery with great fervor. He virtually exhausts human language to convey its incomparable depths and unfathomable heights. Paul, along with other apostles and prophets of Century One, were “stewards of the divine mystery” (1 Cor. 4:1; Col. 1:25–26; Eph. 3:2–9).

On the day that God lifted the curtain and let the secret out, His enemy froze with terror. Satan never saw, dreamed, nor thought that such a thing could be possible. Although God revealed His mystery in the first century, it remains a secret to many Christians today. The Holy Spirit must open the eyes of His people in every generation for them to grasp it. In this way, the great prayer of Paul in Ephesians 1:17–23 is still being answered.

The divine mystery has everything to do with the woman I spoke of earlier. This amazing lady fills the pages of Holy Scripture. She shows up at the very beginning of the Bible; she appears all throughout the middle; and she’s there at the very end. The Scriptures give us an exalted view of this woman along with her immaculate Husband. Each book of the Bible pulsates with her fragrance.

The Eternal Drama

In Genesis 1 and 2, the Bible opens up with a woman and a man. In Revelation 21 and 22, the Bible closes with a woman and a man. The Bible opens up with a wedding, and it ends with a wedding. It opens with a marriage, and it ends with a marriage. It opens with a boy and a girl, and it ends with a boy and a girl.

Your Bible is essentially a love story.

In fact, it's the greatest love story of all time. It is *the* classic romantic tale. Those who know me well can tell you that I'm a huge fan of love stories. My favorite movies are romantic films. These films have the power to evoke strong emotion, even pulling tears from the eyes of their viewers. Yet the most powerful love story that any human has ever crafted pales in comparison to the epic romance that runs throughout your Bible.

Please pay attention to this next sentence: Every love story that the minds of mortal men and women construct, every love story that has made its appearance in the pages of human history—whether fiction or nonfiction—is but a reflection, a pale image, a faint portrait, a scrambled version of the sacred romance of the ages.

God has authored the most incredible love story ever written. It is a story that has set the standard for all romantic literature to follow. Every great saga follows the story line of the hidden romance contained in Scripture. But none can trump it.

You and I were born into such a romance, the romance of the ages.

The heavenly romance that I've been speaking about begins in Genesis 2. Let us now revisit day seven of God's creation and watch the drama unfold.