

FROM ETERNITY TO HERE

Rediscovering the Ageless Purpose of God

Frank Viola

David C. Cook, March 2009

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*

"Of all the sticks of TNT that Frank Viola has launched into a sleepy, statusquo 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 faithfilled 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

Preface

The year was 1992. My life as a Christian changed forever.

All the sermons I heard since I was a child faded dead away. They were profoundly eclipsed by a higher vision. By God's grace, I caught a wondrous glimpse into what Paul called "the eternal purpose" (Eph. 3:11).

For the first time in my Christian life, I discovered that I was involved in something much larger and more glorious than I ever dreamed. The Christian life was no longer merely about winning souls; helping the poor; learning theology; studying doctrine; mastering the Bible; deciphering eschatology; praying more; attending church services; praising and worshipping; doing spiritual warfare; exercising spiritual gifts; hearing God's voice; imitating Jesus; and engaging in good works. Nor was it about the other endless activities that I had been taught were the center of God's will.

I discovered that all of the above had an end in view that went far beyond giving people a celestial fire-insurance policy, bringing in the last great harvest, or changing the world for Christ.

Being a Christian had taken on a completely new meaning. That meaning had to do with something bound up inside the beating heart of God. The Christian life was no longer about me and what I could or should do. Neither was it primarily about others. The needs of human beings became secondary. A page had turned. Suddenly everything became about Him and His ultimate purpose. It all became about God's ageless desire—a desire that is "from him and through him and to him" (Rom. 11:36).

I stepped into a new world where I began to look through the eyes of God and see things from His vantage point rather than from my own. I discovered something of what it means to see the unseen. This high-altitude view hit me so hard that it wiped everything else off the table. I began to see with eyes not physical, and I discovered that the intangibles are where reality lies.

While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Cor. 4:18 nasb)

Did I have it all figured out? Certainly not. Do I now have all the answers? Far from it. But a door had opened that put me on a new journey that I continue to travel this good day.

Before this “epiphany” I had read the Bible dozens of times. I had heard countless sermons and read scores of books and commentaries. Yet despite all of it, I realized that I had genuinely missed the main point. I was blissfully ignorant of the central, all-consuming dream of God that tied everything together. As a result of this realization, I pushed the reset button on my Christian life. I pressed the DELETE key and watched all my religious activities vanish into the electricity.

I hit CTRL-ALT-DEL and rebooted my spiritual CPU.

What was so revolutionary? What exactly did I see? *I had discovered the driving passion of God.* And that passion gave birth to a divinely crafted purpose—a timeless purpose that had little to do with my individualistic efforts at being a good Christian or “going to heaven.” I gradually discovered that the ageless purpose of God stretches from eternity to here, then from here to eternity. It is a purpose so brilliant that the mere glimpse of it can cause the human spirit to be blinded by incomparable glory.

A sighting of that purpose has the power to deliver us from all the things that do not matter; things that do not give life; things that divide and fracture the body of Christ into pieces. The sighting of God’s all-governing purpose possesses the power to set us free from the “me-centered” gospel that’s so commonly dished out today. In addition, I discovered that this purpose runs throughout the entire Bible like an unbroken thread, weaving all of its teachings together into one heart-stirring narrative.

That initial glimpse of the Lord’s ageless purpose has become an ever-expanding revelation within me. It has given my very existence on this earth new meaning and direction. To put it another way, in beholding God’s central purpose, I found my own purpose. In touching His ultimate passion, I found my own passion. This eternal purpose burns in me to this very day. But here is the tragedy. Few Christians speak about God’s eternal purpose today. Amid the innumerable chorus of Christian books that swell the shelves of bookstores every year, relatively few seek to unveil the ageless purpose of our God. And the few that do are rarely page-turners. This includes the scores of missional books that have been written in recent years.

Out of all the books that I have penned, this volume embodies the central burden of my life and ministry. My other volumes on radical church restoration, *The Untold Story of the New Testament Church*, *Pagan Christianity*, and *Reimagining Church*, are dedicated to the practical outworking of the timeless insights contained in these pages. Consequently, this volume can be rightly regarded as my flagship book and a primer for all of my previous works.

As I write these words, a groundswell is occurring in the Christian family. The spiritual terrain is rapidly changing. A revolution is fomenting in the practice of the church. God’s people are rethinking the shape and mission of the *ekklesia*. It is my opinion that this revolution is of God. However, I fear that it will lack depth and focus, and ultimately longevity, if a sighting of God’s

ageless purpose does not fuel it. To be specific, this book takes a fresh look at the mission of God in four unique ways:

1. It defines the divine mission in terms of God's eternal purpose. That purpose is not centered on the meeting of human needs, but on God's passion. God's mission, therefore, is not man-centered, but God-centered.
2. It doesn't emphasize the duty of the individual disciple. It rather stresses that God's mission is bound up with the church—the community of the believers. Therefore, the divine mission is corporate instead of individualistic.
3. The engine of being missional is not religious duty, guilt, condemnation, or ambition. Nor is it rooted in the human will and the desire to do good and please God. Too often, the message we hear in books and from pulpits is, "You're not doing enough for God. God isn't happy with you or your service. There's much work to be done. So you have to try harder and do more." I believe such sentiments are grossly misguided, and they reflect more the thought of man than of God. This book presents a brand-new look at both the motive and the source of our Christian service.
4. A great deal of missional thinking today sees the church through the lens of D. L. Moody—that it's a voluntary association for the saved. As we will see in the following pages, the church is something far beyond what most of us have ever conceived.

This book is crafted into three parts. Each part is really a volume in itself. Yet they all fit together like different pieces of a puzzle. One is not complete without the others. Therefore, many of the issues that I introduce in part 1 are explained more fully and even balanced in parts 2 and 3. In addition, some of the questions that I raise in the beginning of the book are answered at the end. For this reason, one should read the entire book in order to accurately grasp the whole message.

In addition, each part is written in a different style and tends to appeal to a different audience. For example, those who are more right-brain dominant tend to love parts 1 and 2. Those who are more left-brain dominant appreciate part 3 more.

Also in the first two parts, I am using what I call the "Christocentric interpretation" of Scripture. This is the very interpretation that the New Testament authors used to expound the Old Testament. Scholars in the field of canonical criticism use it today as well. If you are not familiar with it, I recommend that you read my article "Beyond Bible Study: Finding Jesus Christ in Scripture."⁺

May the Lord give all who will embark upon these pages a spirit of wisdom and revelation into the ultimate purpose that drives our God. And may He blind them with its glory.

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† You can download this article at no cost at www.ptmin.org/beyond.pdf.

For more information, go to www.FromEternitytoHere.org