

## **BOOK REVIEW**

**By Dr. Bob Young**

Frank Viola. *God's Favorite Place on Earth*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2013.  
[Updated October 2018]

When I received an invitation to review Frank Viola's newest work, I eagerly accepted the offer to read the book and write a review. I read the book the first week of June, but left almost immediately for three weeks of mission work in Honduras and Panama. I returned to the U.S. for only a week before I left for about two weeks in Venezuela. This week I reread the book.

The book was for me both a disappointment and a spiritual challenge. Having read other books by Viola, I was expecting analysis and challenging thinking. Viola is always analytical, but in this book the analysis finds a different outlet. Here is storytelling and an unavoidable challenge to reconsider what it means to have a meaningful relationship with Jesus.

As a free narrative based on the biblical text and research, the book provides a template and guide to demonstrate how one may meditate more deeply on Bible stories and integrate texts that may not appear related. The book challenges the reader to develop a deeper, more meaningful relationship with Jesus based on the special relationships Jesus developed with Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Bethany. Here one finds an invitation to spiritual encounter and a changed life.

Readers should always be aware that authors are seldom far from their theological understandings, and this is the case here, especially with some eschatological imprecision and hypothesis. The problem with telling a story is that story may get ahead of the teachings of the biblical text. Viola has Christ returning to Bethany where the biblical text says the resurrected and living meet him in the air. Viola seems to make Bethany the fulfillment of Revelation 21.

Overall, the book is easy to read, and the inclusion of a "Walking It Out" section in each chapter helps open possibilities for understanding applications in one's daily Christian walk.