



# RAY EDWARDS

LIVE WITH JOY. LEAD WITH PASSION. PROSPER WITH PURPOSE.

## Frank Viola Interview Part II Episode 172

If you haven't listened to episode 171 from last week, it's the first part of this two-part interview with Frank Viola, who's one of my favorite authors of all time and certainly one of my favorite Christian authors of all time. Even if you're not a believer or a Christian but you are a writer, you want to listen both episodes to learn more about how you manage to write and publish 24 books successfully and how you make them excellent. All these things are covered in this lengthy deep conversation about writing between two writers, me and my friend, Frank Viola.

Let's get on with part II. We'll back up just a bit, because in episode I, Frank was telling a story about one his pet peeves when we ended the interview, so that's where we'll pick it up.

**Frank:** Can I share a pet peeve of mine right now, Ray? Do you mind?

**Ray:** Yes, go for it.

**Frank:** There's something on my heart that just happened yesterday!

**Ray:** Tear it up!

**Frank:** Okay. There is probably not a week that goes by, I may be exaggerating there, maybe there is a week, but I would say almost every week I will get an unsolicited email from someone who I don't know, never met them before and the email goes like this. They all sound the same. Hey Frank, I just came out with a new book called, they give me the title, I want to send you a copy. Then they say, I think your readers on your blog would really love it, too, so it would be great if you could say something about it.

I'm talking about a lot of people. If I counted up the emails I get like that, Ray, it probably would be over 100 over the last few years. They are clueless to the fact that they are spamming me, number one. I don't have a relationship with them. I don't know who they are. I have two bookshelves full of books that people have sent me and that's kind gesture, let me see your book, but I don't have time to read these books. I'm a slow reader, by the way. I'm reading books that I have to read that I don't really want to read for research for my own work.

They don't understand that they're asking for promotion, free of charge and if bloggers did that that's all they'd be doing is promoting other people's work. There's a certain naivety involved there, a certain audacity and here's my point. I see people doing this over email. I also see them doing it on Facebook groups. They'll get on a Facebook group or maybe they're part of a group and they'll say guys, I just finished my new book, give the title and link. I think you'll love it.

Right there they just spammed everybody in the Facebook group. And the fact of the matter is, even if one doesn't see it as spam, which it is, that is so ineffective. That person may get lucky if three people actually see the update, let alone have somebody actually buy the book and here's my pet peeve. I want you to imagine a baseball player

who spends all of his time and lots of money paying coaches to teach him how to hit fastballs and he's so good at it he can hit a Nolan Ryan fastball. He can hit a Sandy Koufax fastball. I mean this guy, you throw him a fastball and he's going to hit it out of the park, because that's what he's invested his time, energy and money on.

You know what, he's never spent any money, time or energy, zero investment on how to hit a curveball, a slider or knuckleball. Guess what? He's going to strike out every time. I use that analogy to illustrate what authors are like when they put all this time, energy and money into writing a book, but zero investment in learning how to promote it in effective, ethical non-spammy ways. I will never understand that as long as I live. If you're going to put all that hard work in writing a book, do yourself a favor and learn how to build buzz.

Plugging is when you promote your own work.

Hype is when you exaggerate your own work.

Buzz is what every author wants, that's when other people promote your book fervently and in sincerity and with excitement.

Buzz doesn't just happen there are ways to generate it. That's what we do in the Buzz Seminar, Ray, we teach people how to do this. Is it an investment? Yes! But to my mind as an author, I've published 11 books with major Christian publishers so far and I say this soberly just to make a point, in that seven of them have been bestsellers and that's not an accident. It's because I've taken the time and invested to learn what builds buzz and those principles can be taught to any author anywhere. That's one of the reasons why we put the Buzz Seminar into action, is because we want to give authors who have something to say the means to actually get their book beyond their mother, brother, sister and Sunday school teacher.

**Ray:** And the 100 copies they have in their garage.

**Frank:** Yes, exactly and not have to spam people and write bloggers which, quite frankly, is so ineffective. Anyway, I had to get that off my chest and I'll add this P.S. here... most of the mega bestselling books, to my mind, are pretty shallow, superficial, aren't unique and just repeat what other people have said, but the reason why they're mega bestsellers is because those authors have learned how to build buzz.

**Ray:** Yes.

**Frank:** It's not because of the quality of the work it's either because they have massive platforms, like celebrity pastors or whatever or, they've learned how to build buzz. Now here we have lots of authors who really have something positive to say, unique and powerful, things that aren't being said, but they haven't invested any time in learning how to build buzz and guess what? Nobody reads their books. To me it's a shame and it's something that on a personal level frustrates me, so that's one of the provocations of why we all decided, those of us who are involved in it, created this Buzz Seminar. We really want to help writers get out messages that have value and meaning and not just to write it down, but to get it out there and to see it buzz.

**Ray:** There is so much in what you just said that's important for writers to understand and I want to highlight a couple things that stand out to me. First, I run into this all the time and I'm sure you do too, people who have written good books, maybe excellent books and they have this idea that just because they wrote an excellent book now it's going to be

successful. They feel like the whole subject of creating buzz or marketing is distasteful somehow, so they refuse to learn, invest or be involved in any of that.

I call it the 'discovery syndrome'. They're waiting for someone to discover their genius and it just doesn't happen that way.

**Frank:** No, it doesn't.

**Ray:** I also love the baseball analogy of learning this one thing and you refuse to learn the other aspects of the game and then you wonder why you fail. For me, I have invested lots of money in training and courses about writing, marketing and I've gotten multiple returns on my investments. This is confession time for me. I knew we would be having this conversation and I finally started going through the course in-depth. I contributed remotely since I wasn't able to be at the live event when you imparted much of the material. So I've skimmed the course before, but I started going through it more in-depth in preparation for this conversation and I realized wow, no wonder Frank has more readers than I do. He is doing a lot of things I don't do.

I've now started implementing and working through the steps that are in the Buzz Seminar masterclass and I'm seeing the results of that. I would say to anybody who's wondering why you can't sell books, why you can't get a publishing contract, you wrote a great book why can't you get anyone to read it? The answer is, you haven't done the other part of the work, which is, to build a tribe, an audience, a platform and when you do that your tribe will create the buzz for you and you won't have to be pushy, salesy and sleazy. You don't have to do all that when you do it right.

**Frank:** That's right.

**Ray:** I don't know how many of your books I've sold to people one to one. Maybe I'm talking to someone on the phone and I'll say to them, you need to read *God's Favorite Place on Earth*. I don't know how many copies of that book I've sold for you but it's a lot. I love it, it made such an impact on me because it's so powerful. You've made it easy for me to promote that book to others, because there's a website I can point people to and there are all these different things you've done to make it easy for me to support you and that's what creating buzz is all about, is making it easy for people to support your work.

**Frank:** That's certainly a big part of it. Let me just add, Ray, you mentioned you had a marginal part of the Buzz Seminar, but your presentation which is on the resource page packs so much in on the subject of copywriting, it's phenomenal and highly valuable. One of the things I will say about the Buzz Seminar, which is a reaction to something I don't like, if you take the average 200 page book, the vast majority of that book is padding. The author could have made his main points in 15 pages. The rest of it is illustration and stories, because publishers have to justify selling the book. They aren't going to sell a 15-page book, it has to be at least 200 pages.

When I write a book I have that in mind, so I'm always thinking I don't want padding I'm getting the padding out and I'm going to pack as much in here that I can and that's what the course is like also. When we put the course together our motivation was that people have limited time, time is not a renewable resource so we want to pack as much practical implementable strategies we can without all the padding. Therefore, what you end up with is something incredibly robust, but also streamlined because everything

we're teaching, there's no padding in the presentations. There's so much there yet it's all things that people can put into practice out of the box, so to speak, right away.

Not only that, but we have this resource page which all the members of the buzz course get access to, which makes it evergreen. So every time we find a new plugin, a new strategy, if we discover a new app or something that's working for someone or even a new presentation, we add it to the resource page. So the course keeps growing and becomes more and more valuable, yet the price stays the same and I think that's a great asset as well.

**Ray:** I do too. Of course, we're talking about the course and I want it be available for people to invest in. I think you should, so I'm not going to be shy about that's the reason we're talking about it. If you want to grow your audience and get your writing in front of more people, sell books and get publishing contracts, I think this is required course work that you need to not only learn but do. If you go to [RayEdwards.com/buzz](http://RayEdwards.com/buzz), you'll be able to get the masterclass itself. I'm also going to put together a bonus that I'm going to give my readers if they invest in the course this week.

It's declare your writing independence week. I think this is key to that and it's crucial to your becoming somebody who can, if you want to, make a living from writing or maybe you don't care about that and you just want to get your message out to more people. Either way you need what's in this masterclass.

**Frank:** I appreciate it Ray and I really do believe it's the most valuable thing I know of that does everything that it does and provides everything it provides. I've made the statement many times that if the course was available when I started blogging and writing books, I would have easily paid \$2000 for it. I'm not blowing bubbles when I say that that's a sincere statement and it's of course it's much less expensive than that, but the value is enormous.

I keep my eye out on different products that are being released by different experts in different areas. I saw recently a writing course it's not a publishing course and publicity and blogging course that we have in the Buzz Seminar, but the charge was over \$2000 and that's just a writing course. I think for what you get with this particular resource it'll make a big difference. I'm hoping too that all the authors that have written me and other bloggers saying they want to send me their new book and asking me to mention them on my blog. I hope that stops, because it doesn't have to be.

There's a part of my heart that goes out to these people, because I'm thinking my goodness, not only do they not know what they're doing first of all, but they don't have to do that. It's ineffective. They could be taking their writing talent to parts unknown and get a large readership if they'd just learn some strategies on how to pull it off.

**Ray:** Absolutely. If you have a few more minutes I have a couple things to talk about before we wrap up. First, since we just talked about the buzz masterclass and urged people straightforwardly to buy it, this leads to a question that I'm asked frequently and I'm sure you get this as well.

**Do you do this (the class you're offering, your blog or books), are you just doing this to make money?**

**Frank:** After I made my first \$5 million the answer would have been yes, but now it's just all gravy... I certainly receive a commission from people who purchase the Buzz, but if

anyone knows me personally they know that I refuse to promote anything and refuse to be involved in anything that I, myself, don't believe in, haven't experienced and that hasn't worked for me. If it hasn't solved a problem for me in my own life than you won't find me promoting it, talking about it or even being involved in it.

I've turned down invitations to conferences that were offering me a lot of money to speak, but because I couldn't agree with the agenda of the conference I said no. I'm not someone who does things just for money. I believe that this course solves problems and that's why I'm behind it. I'm perfectly fine to be in that consulting position with nine others and to receive commission for it, because I do think it's valuable and it costs a lot of money to put together. Money isn't the number one motivation, no way.

**Ray:** What about your books? I come to your website at [FrankViola.org](http://FrankViola.org).

**Frank:** Right, everything is there, the blog posts, books, podcasts, etc.

**Ray:** So when you go there you will see what our ads for different books that you offer. Now let me ask the question again... **are you just selling books to make money?**

**Frank:** No, absolutely not. In fact, those who have followed my work and subscribe to my blog know this, but I diverge with most Christian authors in this way, in that the royalties I receive from my published books, that money goes to the poor and oppressed. I have a very strong ministry to help those who are in need. It's one of the major things that drives me. It's one of the major things I'm involved with is helping those who are poor, particularly the oppressed and indigent. I don't profit personally from my book royalties. I receive my share of the family income through affiliates on the blog and advertising and consulting to authors and writers, which the Buzz Seminar is part of.

**Ray:** Okay. I like that. Let me ask another possibly unexpected question... **what about authors who do sell their books and that's how they make their money, and they're Christian books, is that okay?**

**Frank:** I have no problem with that at all, because when it comes to writing a book, an author is doing a lot of work. First, it is an incredible task to write a book. That book costs money; publishers have to pay for it. If the writer is self-publishing then he/she has to pay for everything from the typesetting to the cover to the design to the printing and it's not cheap. There is a concept in the Christian world about money that's still alive today. I thought it had died out years ago, but I guess the vestiges of it are still alive and it goes like this... if you're a Christian then it is immoral for you to sell anything, because the gospel is free.

That makes no sense at all, on any level. The gospel is free, what's the gospel? I'll preach the gospel to you right now in a modified form. Jesus of Nazareth came to this world. He died for your sins. He rose again the third day. He ascended into Heaven and if you trust in him, you repent and believe, you will receive eternal life. That is the basic juiced down version of the gospel. Ray I'm not going to charge you for that, that's free.

However, if a Christian author, like Max Lucado writes a book about going through the storms in your life and he spends a year toiling on that and Thomas Nelson prints it, designs the cover, pays a designer, pays for the marketing and printing and you're going to demand that he gives the book away for free because the gospel is free. Those dots don't connect. Those are two totally different animals. I don't understand that kind of

thinking. I think what's at the bottom of it is that people who make those kinds of arguments really, at the end of the day want a handout. They don't want to pay people for the hard work that they've done.

I'll also say something else too and that is, I've had plumbers in my home who are Christians. Can you imagine me saying to him, sir, you're a Christian so you're not supposed to charge me for the three hours of work you've done on my sink because the gospel is free. I've had people tell me, Paul's letters are free. Guess what? Every letter that I've ever written to my knowledge has been free as well, but the last time I checked every Bible I've purchased, unless a Gideon gave it to me I've had to pay for that.

**Ray:** Let me pause you here for a second, because this is something I got into a discussion with somebody about recently. I understand Bibles cost money to print and we should pay that expense if we're able, but what about these \$100 to \$500 Bibles, because they're a certain leather and paper. If you buy a study Bible, like I bought an ESV that I think was almost \$100. What do you think about that is that profiting from the gospel or is there something more at work there?

**Frank:** Here's how I look at it. If it's a study and I haven't given this a lot of thought.

**Ray:** Sorry to put you on the spot, it's something I've thought about recently.

**Frank:** I have no problem answering. Those ESV Bibles or any study Bible is usually put together by a team of scholars who, and for anybody who does any kind of work no matter what it is time is money, they have spent hours of their time doing research and writing out the research, and then you have to have the typesetter put all of that writing into readable form, edit it, etc. So what you're really paying for mostly is the paper, the cover and all the research that takes an enormous amount of time. I don't know how much these things cost to put together, of course, what the fees are of the people who did the work, but any time you have a product that costs money to produce, somebody had to pay it up front.

Whether it's a book or a Bible, somebody had to pay the cost of the printing, design, paper, typesetting, etc. and any time you have something that's labor intensive, that takes time to put together, that's a cost as well. I will turn around and say this as well since you asked the personal question about myself, I've written probably around 1000 blog posts, all free of charge. I've done a podcast with over 120 episodes, all free of charge. I have several eBooks that I've released that are again free of charge and lots of my published books that you actually have to pay a bookstore to buy or pay Amazon to get the Kindle version, I have at times, been able to persuade my publishers to give those books away for free in a certain timeframe.

So most of my work, personally, I would say 95% is free of charge and then there are those things that go through publishers or if it's a course which costs money to put together and fees that have to do with the website and people who manage it. There's a lot of backend costs, so there's a fee for those.

Jeff Goins', our mutual friend, he wrote an article on my blog not too long ago that was something like, should Christians charge for their work? He wrote an amazing article that blew the soot off this way of thinking that a Christian can't charge for anything. I know on the other hand that there are certainly people who are in ministry just for the money. They charge an exorbitant fee for even speaking or going to a church and planting a



church, and I have my own personal convictions about clergy salaries, being paid to minister and so forth, but that's neither here nor there.

I think the point we're making is that a Christian can sell something that has taken their time and energy, especially if it has cost them to put it together, whether it's a publisher or what have you. That doesn't make them a swindler or profiting from the gospel. There are those who do, in fact, profit from the gospel. There are people who are dishonest and who make money off the Lord's people. They're usually people asking for donations and then saying if you donate then God's going to do this for you, and we all know about those kinds of folks.

Those are my thoughts. I think there's a lot of confusion on it and if people would read the article by Jeff on my blog it would make a big difference and help a lot.

**Ray:** I agree. You also have a podcast episode that you did recently about the question of whether Christians should be rich. I think that would also be illuminating for people to listen to. If you're going to listen to that by the way, you tell folks to listen all the way to the end, because you might think you know what I'm going to say but you never really know. I encourage people to listen to the very end.

**Frank:** I appreciate that. That was a tricky one. Shane Claiborne is someone I have a lot of respect for. I think he says a lot of things that are dead on when it comes to our American prosperous country and the way that many middle to upper class view the world and the poor. I think his ministry is awesome, but he wrote an article called Is It Wrong for Christians to be Rich. I posted it on my blog and had mixed responses both for and against. I promised I would weigh in on it and I did. If you want to listen to that, go to the Christ Is All podcast and give it a whirl.

**Ray:** It will certainly make you think. Whatever it is you think you believe you'll think about it.

**Frank:** That's exactly what I wanted to do, so that's also encouraging to me to hear you articulate that.

**Ray:** I have a couple more things and then we'll wrap up. This has been one of the best interviews I have ever conducted, so thank you for that. **You've written 20 books or so, what is your favorite of your own books?**

**Frank:** I think my favorite would be *God's Favorite Place On Earth*. Right behind that would be *From Eternity to Here* and then *Jesus Manifesto*, which I wrote with Leonard Sweet.

**Ray:** I like them all. **What are some of your favorite Christian authors, present day or past?**

**Frank:** My favorite authors, unfortunately are all dead or sleeping with the Lord. I say that because in the New Testament when Paul talks about a Christian dying he always says they sleep, we don't really die. That would be T Austin Sparks, someone that most have never heard of. To my mind he had the greatest revelation and insight into Christ, into God's eternal purpose which is the grand mission of all things since Paul of Tarsus. His insight into the Lord and the things of God trumps Calvin Wesley, Luther, and all the greats. He was this hidden vessel in England, who was prolific. Most of his books are free online. He's number one.

Behind him is A.W. Toser, a favorite and then Watchman Nee, not all of his work but much of it. I put together on my blog a banner that says the best 100 books ever written. You'll find my top picks there. The books on this list for me personally, have been the most valuable. I don't go for what's popular I go for what's deep. If you're looking for depth, I would say that getting back to why people read my blog, the common thread that I would say that marks my readers is they have this one statement that they articulate or its burning in their hearts.

*There has to be something more to the Christian faith than this, than what I've been hearing, been exposed to, than what I hear preached on Sunday, than what I've read.*

There is and that top 100 books will give you a peek into that from my perspective.

**Ray:** I have just begun digging into those books. Watchman Nee is deep and challenging. I like that. **What book has had impact on you that you have given to other people more than any other book?**

**Frank:** Probably the *School of Christ* by T. Austin Sparks and *The Normal Christian Life* by Watchman Nee.

**Ray:** Frank, thank you so much. This has been a fantastic conversation. I'm sure I'll be going back to listen and taking notes on some of the gems you've shared with us. I want to express my appreciation again for you taking time to do this.

**Frank:** I appreciate you having me on. I've enjoyed it. I appreciate your friendship and love your blog and podcasts. I hope that this helps people who listen.

---

### **What to Do Now**

Thank you again, Frank, for such a wonderful interview and those kind words. I urge you, if you want to grow your blog or business online or your readership, to get a hold of Franks course at [BuzzSeminar.com/edwards](http://BuzzSeminar.com/edwards). If you buy through this link we'll send you a special gift. You can also click on the link by going to [RayEdwards.com/172](http://RayEdwards.com/172).

We'll be back to our normal format next week. I hope you've enjoyed this two-part interview with Frank Viola. He had so much good stuff to say. Until then I pray that God continues to bless you and that He does more for you than you can ask or even possibly imagine.

Transcripts of these podcasts are available by clicking the link in the show notes. Transcripts are provided by our friends at [SuccessTranscripts.com](http://SuccessTranscripts.com), a great solution if you need your podcast, sermon, speech or other audio/video transcribed.