

2000 ONE
POMEGRANATES
AND AN AUDIENCE OF

CREATING A LIFE OF MEANING AND INFLUENCE

SHAWN WOOD



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INTRODUCTION

The Artist's Mandate

As I watched every deliberate, yet seemingly effortless movement, I was amazed. Each and every action led to yet another beautiful layer of the canvas that was taking shape. Color and imagination, heart and soul were being poured into every detail of this work before her, and it was at this very moment that I knew I was watching an artist at her work. Her canvas seemed at times to war against her, but with determination she was creating something very special. The artist was my wife and the canvas my nearly two-year-old daughter.

Mommies are artists.

The opportunity for a hostile situation stood before him like a huge rock of granite. It seemed almost impossible to move and determined to stay hard and unshaped. But using the power of words my friend Josh has the ability to craft and sculpt beautiful art out of the most callous of situations. With the use of just the right words he creates an art show on display for the world to see.

Coworkers are artists.

Karen has lost her husband of nearly thirty years at the age of fifty-two. As I sit with her in a time of heartache, I realize that just moments earlier she lost more

than I can imagine and that she can barely breathe. In coming days we are both struck by the fact that God still has her here for a purpose, but through tear-clouded eyes it seems hard to find. Then she says it--words that will stay with me for some time. Through her grief she reminds herself that she has a group of second graders waiting for her. She is the architect of these little lives and though that may be all that is left, that is a task worth living for. So everyday she wakes up because there are lives to be built and dreams to be planned.

Teachers are artists.

Terry leaves no detail untouched. I have seen him take the extra time to look over a job a second or third time to make sure that his work is just right. I have seen him do this when the customer is there, but I happen to know that he does it when no one is looking as well. His job is more than making money to him; his business is more than just a reflection of himself. Every oil change is an opportunity to represent God and an opportunity to build a legacy. Every tune-up is an orchestra he brings into harmony with a wave of his baton.

Mechanics are artists.

No longer is art limited to painters and musicians. Each one of us is an artist, endowed by our Creator with skills and talents that can make our world a more beautiful place. Every good mom is an artist, molding her children as a creation of God. Every teacher makes a mark on the young people in his or her classroom. Every ethical businessperson leaves a legacy of people seeing God through his or her careful and honest work.

Through the story of an obscure but exemplary biblical character, we will explore the value of creative work in God's eyes. Hiram of Tyre was an artist in the literal sense--a bronzeworker helping construct the temple in Jerusalem.

My guess is that unless you are an Old Testament scholar you have probably never heard of Hiram of Tyre. In fact, a quick search of "Hiram, 1 Kings, Bible" on Google and Wikipedia brings up nothing except the stories in 1 Kings and Chronicles that inspired this book.

As I think through every male I have known in my life, I can recollect knowing an Adam, a Joshua, a Joseph, a Noah, and an Abraham. Believe it or not I even



once knew a dude named Melchizedek. I have never known a Hiram. There are not a lot of parents thinking they have finally landed on a name for their child after studying 1 Kings. If they did, it would probably not even be the Hiram this book is about.

Some of the confusion comes with the apparent lack of creativity on the part of Hiram's mom. Being from Tyre, she named her son after the king, also named Hiram. If you read carefully, you will find that there are two men named Hiram from Tyre in 1 Kings, and they are contemporaries. One is a king. The Hiram this book focuses on is not the king. Then the confusion gets even thicker as he is called *Hiram-abi* in Chronicles, that is, *Hiram is my father*. Can we get one more Hiram, please?

Several of the modern translations try to make things a little easier by spelling one name Hiram and the other Hiram (since the original Hebrew text didn't have vowels in it anyway). It makes me want to sing the "you say tomayto, I say tomahto" song. I love the way *The Message* paraphrase of the Bible tries to clear things up for us a little in a parenthetical explanation in 1 Kings 7:13 (emphasis mine): "King Solomon sent to Tyre and asked Hiram (*not the king; another Hiram*) to come."

So now that we have cleared that up, let me tell you a little about the book you are about to read. Along our quest to discover how to live a meaningful and influential life, we're going to follow the lead of this guy Hiram and the work of art he created. It's a very small story of a not-so-famous guy in a book that few have read. How is that for a sales pitch? Let's be honest, there are parts of the book of 1 Kings that have been the bane of many of our "we are going to read the Bible in a year" New Year's resolutions. (Come on, you know you have been tempted to skim parts of 1 Kings too.) First Kings is a basic history of the kings of Israel--thrilling to the history buffs among us, but laborious to those looking for a lot of practical application. However, tucked away in the Old Testament book is the often overlooked story of a man we never knew but whose example can teach us a lot.

Through the story of the two hundred pomegranates that Hiram created for an audience of one, we will see how he made an amazing contribution just by using his talents and doing his job with integrity and humility. We will come to understand how we too can create something beautiful in the eyes of God



simply by being the best parent, coach, teacher, welder, pastor, accountant, spouse, trash collector, (fill in your position here) that we can be.

In the story of Hiram and his two hundred pomegranates we find the artist's mandate--five essential components of life-artistry:

- Get great at something
- Do something with that talent
- Invest yourself in things that will last and that others will benefit from
- Work for an audience of one, because sometimes our best work is seen only by God
- Finish what you start.

If everyone is an artist then life itself is a grand work of art.
What are you creating?



My wife and I had recently moved to the Raleigh, North Carolina, area for me to work on my master's degree in theology. We were the ripe ages of twenty-one and twenty-two and had been married about ten minutes (OK, five months, but who is counting?) when we drove into the Research Triangle to start our life together.

We had been planning the move for all of our married lives, so in our wisdom we had saved about eighteen dollars as a safety net. Because of our financial shortcomings we needed to get jobs, save some money, and then we would look for a place to rent. In one of the few early wise choices, I had arranged to live rent-free for a month or so with some friends, who were also in the area for school, just to get our feet wet.

Knowing this plan and our situation, just one week after moving to Raleigh I came home with a Polaroid picture of our new home and presented it to my wife in a card I bought from the drugstore. "Look what I bought us today, baby!" I exclaimed. Yes, you read that right. I bought our first home (and our first car) without my wife seeing them. I would later learn that not only is that not nice—it's just stupid.

Fast-forward a month or so and there we were in a house that my wife saw for the first time through a Polaroid, making a life in the big city. Life was good. We were loving the new area. We were loving being married. Connie was even starting to love the house. On a few occasions, however, I had heard her mention that there were a couple of things about the house that she really would like to change. "Hardwood floors would look good," she had commented, and, "French doors opening out to the deck would be nice as well."

We were eight months into this marriage and I was really trying to learn how not to make another Polaroid mistake, so I took note of these comments and thought to myself, "Hardwood floors, that can't be that difficult."

So I set out on the pilgrimage that all men must go on at some time in their young lives: the first trip to Home Depot without their dad. I fumbled through the store looking for what I would need to destroy—I mean, remodel—my home.

Like a five-year-old sheepishly meandering through the aisles of Mr. Wonka's factory, I finally saw the golden ticket. Apparently they had just invented hardwood floors for dummies. These were not like the hardwood floors that they make now that just snap in place with hardly any work at all. I wish those had been around—my two-year-old could put those together like they were Lego toys. You had to nail these in place, but at least they were prefinished, which was a whole lot better than seeing me with a can of varnish. Given my history of only swinging hammers to smash spiders, this was just the deal for me. I quickly guessed at how much I would need to cover our little abode and bought a few boxes of hardwood flooring. As I walked to the front of the store I remembered that there was a football game on that afternoon that I really wanted to watch. I reasoned in my head that surely I could get this done in an hour or two.

As afternoon settled on the Wood home, I had gotten as far as ripping up all of the carpet in our living room. (I had definitely underestimated the time this would take.) Dust was billowing all over the place and I was a

seminary student on the verge of cussing out loud. I had already cussed a lot in my head. What I had failed to realize is that hammering nails into hardwood is hard. It is even harder if you try to use a Fisher-Price hammer made for preschoolers. So I loaded up and headed back to mecca. As I entered Home Depot for the second time in one day, I decided to try using my words and found another human who might be able to answer my questions. I have often wondered what this man must have been thinking as I asked him how to install the hardwood floor, which I had already purchased, onto the floor of my home that—thanks to me—had no carpet. He explained that I needed a nail gun. That sounded fun and dangerous all at the same time. “Sweet! Where do I get one?” I asked. Lucky for me they will rent a nail gun to any seven-year-old with his daddy’s credit card, and so I was off again to remodel.

Long story even longer, six months later I was still trying to get the hardwoods finished in my home when the opportunity of my young marriage presented itself like a Christmas gift on New Year’s Eve. My wife was leaving town for a long weekend at a women’s conference. That’s when the plan came to me. I would work 24/7 to get the hardwoods completed; and for a big surprise birthday present for my honey, I would install those French doors as well! As soon as she drove out of sight, I jumped in my car and made the now all-too-familiar drive to the Depot where, like an episode of *Cheers*, they really did all know my name. I went in and grabbed the closest thing to French doors I could find (I think they were from the Netherlands or someplace, but hey, we were on a budget) and was off to do some more damage. I had finally found an excuse to buy a sledgehammer, and as soon as I got home I started knocking out sheetrock. As I knocked away more and more sheetrock and more and more two-by-fours that seemed to be in the way of my Dutch doors, I felt this rush of excitement. My wife had only been gone for two hours and look at all of the progress I was making! I had torn down nearly 25 percent of the back of my house in no time at all—I felt like Bob Vila, and it was good.

No one had ever told me that demolition was much easier than building. No one had explained to me what a weight-bearing wall was. I also had not thought to do more than eye the width of the doors, so I had taken

out a few more feet than was needed. As night fell, I had a huge hole in the back of my house and a set of Belgian doors that I had no idea how to install. Then it started to rain—sideways.

Maybe we will finish that story later, but I can report that Connie and I were able to still sell the house a couple of years later. So many times since this event I have tried to be a handyman around the house. I have tried to build fences, install ceiling fans, tear up linoleum floors—you name it. There is this innate desire within human beings that longs to be great at something. This is a God-given desire that pushes all of us toward goals and achievements in our life. I've learned that I should stay away from home improvement, but I believe that my efforts in that area are simply part of the desire God has placed in each of our hearts to become a great artist. By "artist" I don't just mean a person working with brushes and paint, or even with hammers and wood. An artist is someone—anyone—who creates and cultivates. It is someone who can step away and look at her work and know that she created the thing of beauty standing before her. I can see this knowledge in the bright eyes of my two-year-old daughter when she scribbles with crayons but in her mind's eye she is drawing a little girl holding a balloon (I know because she told me so). I can see it in myself—in the eyes a husband who desperately wants to show his wife how much he loves her, but in doing so destroys their home.

We all long to be great at something because the God who created us is an artist, and we are created in his image. The problem is many of us are trying to get great at the wrong things—and some of us are trying to get great at everything. We battle to become great at so many things that it seems like we focus on things in which we are not proficient to the exclusion of that one thing that is really our gift. We will have the opportunity to be good at many things in our lives, and most of the time "good enough" really is good enough. But in a few areas of our lives, God really does equip and call us to be great. We find at least one man who was different.

This man—the hero of this little book—is introduced in 1 Kings 7:13-14:

The rest of the book coming
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