



a  
million  
little  
ways

uncover the art  
you were made to live

emily p. freeman



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For Dad—

You taught me to see beyond *what is* to *what could be*.  
Thank you for connecting the dots.

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P A R T  
1

## who is the artist?

You want to know the meaning of life? This is your highest calling: You are called into the dynamic co-creation of the cosmos. This breath is your canvas and your brush. These are the raw materials for your art, for the life you are making. Nothing is off limits. Your backyard, your piano, your paintbrush, your conversation, Rwanda, New Orleans, Iraq, your marriage, your soul. You're making a living with every step you take.

—Jon Foreman

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# 1



## *awake*

Art is when we do work that matters in a creative way, in a way that touches [people] and changes them for the better.<sup>1</sup>

—Seth Godin, author and entrepreneur

She was twenty when I first saw her, old enough to look up to but not so old I couldn't relate. I walked into the youth room of Highland Park Baptist Church late that night so the program had already started. Michigan winters didn't lend themselves to much inspiration, so when I saw her sitting up front leaning against a stool, her deep-set, mysterious eyes holding more stories than she ought to know at so young an age, I knew something was about to happen. Her

generosity was palpable. She picked up her guitar, her small frame nearly disappearing behind it.

And she began to sing.

Her lyrics dripped heavy with questions and faith and love and longing. She didn't just sing notes, she sang *story*.

I came undone.

Listening to Sarah Masen sing that night, the winter before I turned eighteen, I thought it was her voice and her talent that touched me so deeply. I was aware of a mysterious movement within me, but I was unable to define it.

And so, I did what most people do. I believed it was her skill that moved me. That night I wished more than anything to have a talent like hers. I grieved the fact that my singing voice was average, my painting skills didn't exist, and my dancing was limited to jerky, stiff cheerleading moves.

I had heard talented musicians before. But this time was different. She offered herself honestly and beautifully, sharing something from within her laced with courage and hope. She showed me beauty and woke up a longing in me to take part in it. The beauty she shared was, quite simply, herself. And in sharing herself, she showed me a glimpse of the glory of God.

Decades later, I'm circling around that winter night in Michigan, realizing what was stirred up in me and knowing it matters. Technicians don't move us. Artists do. Skill may be impressive and even necessary, but skill alone doesn't touch the soul. The profound gift Sarah gave me was the recognition that it wasn't her skill that moved me, it was her *art*.

Sarah introduced me to a shadow of my true self, touched something in me that was there but sleeping. That's what artists do. They pull back the covering on our inner life, allowing

us to see things beneath the surface, things that, without their compassion, creativity, and generosity, we may have missed.

The song lyric.

The exchange between actors on the screen.

The image of Paris in the snow.

The tuning of the strings before the show.

Art coming from honest hands shows us beauty, stirs up longing, and touches us deeply.

But what about this:

The extra care the cashier takes with your order, the way she looks you in the eye, asks how you are, if you need help or a price check, as if her work is important *and she knows it*.

The teacher who makes history come alive, telling stories filled with facts and truth and background, while students learn without even realizing it.

How many times have we been rushing through the day, weary from the world, grieving a loss we didn't even know we were grieving, and all it takes is for a stranger to offer to carry our bags from the baggage carousel to the curb and we break down as if they offered to buy us a house or bring our loved ones back from the dead?

Cashiers and cellists are capable of making art because they both have the power to influence, to be fully awake to their Maker, and fully aware of his making of them.

I can't imagine anything more dangerous to the enemy of our hearts than people who know who they are.

Maybe you have in your mind a moment in time when you have been moved by the heart of an artist—you remember a second grade teacher who woke up in you a love for reading, a best friend who supported you in the midst of college drama,

a musician who offered himself so fully to his audience that you couldn't shake the feeling for days after the concert.

It's easy to point out the influence in others, to see them as images of the Divine Artist, to be liberal with our admiration, compliments, or even our criticism.

But what of your own influence? What about the conviction of your true self, pointed out, accepted, and poured out as an offering?

Maybe you are a person who thinks art is for other people. Maybe you can't imagine God having art in mind when he made you. Maybe you doubt the connection between the work you do with your hands and the story you are telling with your life.

All of that has a particular time and place, right? Art is for a certain type of person doing a certain type of thing.

Art isn't for you.

Is it?

Could it be true that you, too, are an artist?

And if it could be true, wouldn't you want to find out what that might mean?

You don't need a test or an expert evaluation or an extensive and professional analysis to find out what kind of art you might have to offer.

You don't need to gear up for a long journey or take time off work.

Instead, I hope to do for you what Sarah did for me—pull back the layers suffocating the truth of who you really are.

Maybe you have a dream or a desire to move into the world, something you're always talking yourself out of. Or maybe you *wish* you had a way to influence others but you don't think you do.

It is my intention to introduce practices to help you uncover the art already alive within you.

*You were born to make art.*

But that's not all.

It is also my intention to walk with you as you begin to release your art into the world, for the glory of God and the benefit of others.

*Because you were also made to live art.*

It's time to rescue our beautiful design from the dark grip of doubt and discouragement.

It's time to remember the Spirit of power and love and a sound mind who lives within us.

It's time to live as though we believe we have something to offer.

It's time to release our authentic selves into the world.

Because it isn't only the painters who are allowed to be expressive, it isn't only the musicians who can touch our souls, it isn't only the novelists who can inspire us to dream.

Have you noticed how God does things?

Have you considered the way he colors the sky? Or the smallest details in the blades of grass or grains of sand beneath your feet?

Is he only a God of right answers and right angles and acceptable behavior? Have we exalted *the will of God* and *the plans of God* above God himself?

He does not manage us, to-do list us, or bullet-point us. He loves us. Is *with us*. And believing him feels impossible, until we do, like a miracle, like lukewarm water turning merlot red right there in the cup. And hope sprouts new, because God doesn't give us a list. He invites us into the story.

who is the artist?

God is not a technician. God is an Artist.

This is the God who made you. The same God who lives inside you.

He comes into us, then comes out of us, in a million little ways.

That's why there's freedom, even in the blah.

Hope, even in the dark.

Love, even in the fear.

Trust, even as we face our critics.

And believing in the midst of all that? It feels like strength and depth and wildflower spinning; it feels risky and brave and underdog winning.

It feels like redemption.

*It feels like art.*