1. The title of this book gets our attention right away, but I’m not sure I know what you mean about being my own worst enemy. Can you say more?

This book was born out of my own experience of shutting myself down one day when I was asked to speak to my classmates in graduate school. A few weeks before that day, I had been invited by my professor to take a part in the class because he thought I had some helpful insights and wanted others to hear them. When I got up to speak, I just said a fraction of what I had prepared. Everything else in that situation was affirming, but in that moment I became my own worst enemy.

2. How is that different from just a simple fear of public speaking?

I think the difference comes from a pretty complicated internal dynamic that took me a while to sort through. I’m actually pretty good at public speaking and am generally not really afraid of it, but what shut me down that day was this little voice inside that said, “Just who do you think you are?” The presence of that contemptuous voice is what made that incident more about self-sabotage than about the fear of public speaking.

3. I’ve heard self-sabotage referenced a lot in popular culture, but can you define it for us?

I think the best definition is actually to describe the experience of it. You know it when you feel it because it is more an internal than an external force. Interestingly, as I talked with other women, many used those exact words (“Just who do you think you are?”) as they described their experiences of self-sabotage. It works like an undertow that usually happens when you are operating out of your most true and strong giftedness, when you are daring to shine, just like the song says: “This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine.” In fact, owning our calling to shine as a biblical calling is a critically important part of dealing with this destructive force.

4. How is shining different from pride, or is it any different?

That is such an important question. I think one of the reasons we seldom talk about self-sabotage in the church is because there’s a lot of confusion between shining and pride as well as between hiding our light and humility. Think about it, if shining were the same as pride, would God call us to shine? Of course not. The core difference is relationship with God. Pride writes God out of the moment while shining is radiating the Spirit and love of God through the uniquely shaped gifts and personhood God has entrusted to each one of us.

5. What did you mean by the other side of the equation, that hiding is not humility?

So often we won’t dare to shine because we are afraid it will be prideful so we end up hiding our gifts and even hiding ourselves, making ourselves out to be a nothing or a zero and thinking that is the best way to honor God. But God did not set the system up that way! When Paul talks about thinking rightly about ourselves, he then lists the gifts and instructs us to use whatever gift we have been given with passion and faithfulness. The root word of humility is humus, meaning earth. To be humble is not to be invisible or a nothing but instead to live the glory of God through the unique reality of our individual humanity.

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6. In My Own Worst Enemy, you primarily use stories of women, both from modern day and the Bible. Is this something that happens only with women?

Though not exclusive to women, I would say that women struggle with this much more than men and in ways common to women across time and culture. I use the stories of women in the Bible because they hold incredible, time-aged wisdom and in many ways are the best language I have found to describe my own deep soul difficulties. Interestingly, many men do not understand this book because they simply don’t experience life in the same way. And because of that difference, those men who choose to read it will have new and helpful insight into the women with whom they live and relate.

7. Does self-sabotage look the same for all women?

Definitely not. In the first section of My Own Worst Enemy, I talk about three different faces or broad categories of self-sabotage: the unimagined life, the unworthy life, and the unlived life. The unimagined life describes women for whom sabotage looks like not-so-benign neglect. As over-nurturers, we can get so lost facilitating the callings of others that our own unique calling from God, which may include but is often not limited to that help, goes unanswered. The unworthy life describes the woman whose shining is sabotaged by overwhelming shame. And the unlived life describes those of us who sabotage our lives by seeing ourselves more like competent production machines than the gloriously alive women God has created us to be.

8. Does this struggle change over time as women grow?

Yes. In my own life, the battle was initially around issues of identity. Will I pretend or really be present and be myself? Once I found the courage to live more authentically, I began to face the temptation to sabotage my own creativity. The question then became, “Will I conform to the crowd or create that which only I could create?” Once I began to authentically create, I ran into my own hesitations to live radiantly rather than recoiling when others saw me shining.

9. Are there proactive choices women can make to help prevent self-sabotage?

Thanks be to God, yes! I spend the entire second half of My Own Worst Enemy talking about the marvelous biblical examples of women like Esther and Naomi and Mary (Jesus’ mother), and this feisty little known Old Testament woman called the wise woman of Abel. Their stories can become powerful guides for us today, and they can become really effective mentors.

10. Why is this an important issue for us today?

Population-wise women make up more than half of the church. The kingdom of God needs all of our gifts lived with all of our passion. This is an “all hands on deck” moment. Not one is optional or unimportant. Self-sabotage steals so much, not just from each of us as individuals, but also from the kingdom. So many brilliant and gifted women are hiding and mistakenly believe that pleases God. That song we teach our children, “This Little Light of Mine,” is not child’s play or a nice option. It is a mandate, a commandment meant to bless us, and the world all around us, with the love of Jesus.