

I. Introduction

A. Over the last few weeks there have been hundreds of jokes about Tiger Woods. I briefly considered opening with one but decided that that would set the wrong tone, because I start this talk with the belief that there is a little bit of Tiger in all of us.

1. By which I do not mean that we all have a nearly perfect golf swing or several hundred million dollars – that we are a global icon of sorts.

2. But instead that, “there but for the grace of God go I.”

3. I fully believe that under similar circumstances I am more than capable of making as big a mess of my life as he has of his. Of violating the vows I made to my wife and others, and otherwise living a secret life of selfishness, greed and sin.

II. Let me back up for a few minutes, set the stage and get a running start. For the sake of this talk I am making two assumptions.

A. First, that everyone here knows who Tiger Woods is - the face of the PGA

1. The global superstar who not only dominated the last decade of golf but repositioned and re-popularized the sport before then going on to transcend it – not only winning Sportsman of the Year and Sportsman of the Decade honors, but also becoming the first billionaire athlete.

B. And secondly, I am assuming that you’ve heard about his rather spectacular fall. Not all of the details are clear, but what is clear is that what was initially reported as a single car accident was part of something much bigger. And since it happened:

1. Tiger has admitted to his wife that he had been unfaithful;

2. And we have learned that he is not who we thought he was;

3. And he has taken a leave from golf and gone into hiding.

4. And a number of his sponsors have cut their ties with him.

C. The story actually has so many angles that one editor complained that he didn’t know where to run it.

1. It started as a traffic accident – so it’s a local news story.

2. But it contains details about a celebrity’s sex life, which would put it on the entertainment section

3. But Tiger is a golfer, so it's a sports story
4. But some say the scandal has cost the stockholders of the companies he endorses to lose 12 billion dollars – so it's a business story.

D. About the only two aspects of the paper it didn't touch was the weather and religion – and then Brit Hume weighed in, saying that Tiger needed to come to faith in Christ and seek forgiveness. And that only via this path can he make a full recovery as a person.¹

E. For all sorts of reasons this is a story that is going to be discussed by many groups.

1. PR handlers will study it in hopes of being able to help future clients
2. Corporate sponsors will watch it to learn if Nike (which has stayed with Tiger) or Accenture (which has dropped him) made the right move.
3. Divorce lawyers may be called in – which will become a case study on its own.

III. Many people can learn many things from Tiger's story. I sure have.

A. In the process of researching this story I got an updated take on culture – much of which was depressing, but not all.

1. His infidelity has been understood to be a scandal by almost everyone.²
2. And some have made very specific calls for Tiger to act like a man.
 - a) In an article entitled, "Tiger Woods Should Take This Opportunity To Grow Up," Sally Jenkins, a sports columnist for the Washington Post, writes, "There are a lot of questions surrounding Woods at the moment, from how many women to how long his indefinite leave from golf will last, but most of them are side issues. The question that really matters, the pressing one is this: When will Woods become a man?"³
3. Some of what I learned was encouraging – but most was not. Most was depressing.

- a) Some because it was lurid. Many of the women who slept with Tiger are giving details about their escapades to anyone who will listen – details that would have caused wide spread shame 30 years ago and gotten them arrested 100 years ago. Details that would get them stoned in many parts of the world today. Reading this stuff reminded me of how rapidly we are – to quote the late Patrick Moynihan – defining deviancy down.
4. Some of it was depressing because it showed how focused on celebrities we've become.
- a) There are untold magazines and news shows that promote the lives of thin people
- b) And by “thin” I don't just mean they do not weigh much, although mostly that's the case. They just don't have much bearing. Much to offer.
- c) In Pilgrim's Progress, John Bunyan's classic allegory of the Christian life, he has Christian, who is trying to make it to the celestial city - trying to get to heaven – get sidetracked in Vanity Fair. In this meaningless carnival town
- d) Vanity Fair is meant as a term of derision. Like the term celebrity. It was coined to refer to something bad.⁴ Now Vanity Fair is a magazine and Tiger is on the cover.
- e) I am depressed because vanity fair has become such common fair.
5. I could go on. Wood's story got me thinking about how odd it is that celebrity endorsements work.
- a) I get the value in knowing what kind of clubs Tiger used because it makes sense that he is using the best stuff.
- (1) But, given that he is getting paid to use them, that's not even really the case. All I can ascertain from the fact that Tiger hits Nike golf ball is that they paid him more than Titleist
- (2) And who cares what he has to say about watches, cars and consulting companies.
- b) The fact that Tiger is a good golfer means that he is a good golfer. It doesn't make him discerning. It doesn't make him a great person. It doesn't mean that we should study his life or dress like he does.

c) It means he has a talent for what Mark Twain called “a good walk spoiled.”

B. There is a lot here. I want to focus on what we can learn from his fall.

IV. In fairness to Tiger there are other things about his life that could be studied.

A. Starting with his golf swing and continuing with his hard work.

1. He is not just sheer talent, he is sheer talent plus a keen work ethic

2. I have told my boys about one interview with him that I saw. He had just won a tournament and was being interviewed by a reporter who asked, “When you would watch golf tournaments as a kid, did you think it would be like this?”

a) And Woods said, “I didn’t watch much golf growing up.

b) And the reporter said, “Surely you were watching the sudden death playoff between ? and ?, back in ?????”

c) And Woods said, “No, I was out practicing. I didn’t want to watch it on TV, I wanted to win it in real life. You don’t get to the top watching TV.”

d) This is a man who has worked hard.

B. There is something to be said for his willingness to reinvent his swing at a time when he was already the best golfer in the world.

C. We could look at his philanthropic work.

D. We could look at how he has transcended race and blazed some trails for African Americans in golf.⁵

V. Additionally, there are a number of things that need to be said in his defense.

A. It appears likely that his Dad pushed too hard.

1. Clearly, Tiger’s early success says more about Earl Woods than it does about Tiger’s talent.

2. For the most part, Woods seemed to thrive under that attention. But perhaps that is not the full story.

3. Agassi's book *Open* reports that his life was not at all what it seemed, and that as a child he suffered at the hands of a dad who pushed too hard.

a) He was miserable. Says he lived in fear and confusion that eventually led him into self-destructive behavior – that included setting fires to his hotel room and doing drugs.

4. We see this pattern over and over.

a) Lots of high achieving men who achieve a lot because they are driven to please their fathers – even years after their fathers have passed away. And who eventually spin out of control because we are not simply performance machines.

5. Tiger's father drove him. Aggasi's father drove him. Ted Turner's father drove him. I just read an article on the lengths to which Urban Meyer's father drove him

6. In every case these men have reached remarkable heights. But in every case what we see on the courts or board rooms or sidelines is not the whole story. Some of these men succeed in one dimension but not in others.

7. Again, this list is very long. We'll be revisiting it next fall.

B. And in his defense, he is hardly the first young sport's champion to stray from his marriage vows⁶ and no one would want the worst part of their lives played out on every news channel in the world.⁷

VI. Suffice it to say that when it comes to Tiger there are things to celebrate and complicating or contributing factors to his fall. But that is not where we are going to focus. I want to look at what we can learn from his fall.

A. Few have fallen so far so fast in the public eye. The question I want to ask is, "What can we learn from this?"

B. I'd like to do this without sounding like a self-righteous jerk. So let me repeat that I believe that: There is a bit of Tiger in all of us. And we don't know what we'd have done in his situation.

C. But I don't want to shy away from the fact that he has cheated on his wife and been caught lying to lots of other people for his own gain.⁸

D. Phil Knight has called Tiger's problems, "a minor blip." I disagree. I think it's a major misstep and I'd like to learn from it.

E. It seems to me that there are at least three big takeaways.

VII. Number One: The Book of Ecclesiastes is true – Ultimate Satisfaction is found only in God.

A. The Book of Ecclesiastes is part of the wisdom literature of the Old Testament.

B. It was written by Solomon around 1000 BC and is famous for the line, “vanity of vanities, it’s all vanity.” Although if you’ve read it all the way through then you know that the message of the book is not that it’s all vanity. The message of the Book is that everything other than God is going to come up short.

1. We are not going to find ultimate satisfaction in money, sex or power

C. It ends with Solomon, who - like Tiger - had everything this world could offer, stating:

1. Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil. (Ecc. 12:13f)

D. G.K. Chesterton offers a brilliant synopsis of Tiger’s situation and the Book of Ecc when he writes:

1. “The man who knocks on the door of a brothel is looking for God.”

2. That is, the person who is looking to buy sex – as one example – is looking to be complete. Looking to be happy. Looking for joy. Looking for transcendence.

3. Looking because they have a hole in their heart that was designed for God, but looking in the wrong place.

E. We were made for more than what we see.

F. We were made by God for a relationship with him. Until we get that we are never ultimately complete and we’ll keep looking for things to give us meaning and pleasure.

1. Some believe that wholeness will come through fame, others through power, many through sex or pleasure, others through money.

2. Some have already started to realize that their life is hollow – or their marriage is a sham – and are quite miserable and are looking to sex or power or drugs as a way to cope.

- a) They are self-medicating
 - b) An affair – no strings attached – offers pleasure without responsibility. A brief high not unlike a drug. But it doesn't work.
- G. The Book of Ecclesiastes says – none of those things ultimately work.
- H. Men, take note. Here is a man who had virtually everything he could possibly want:
- 1. An attractive wife.
 - 2. More money than he could ever spend
 - 3. All the stuff money can buy, including multiple homes, jets, boats
 - 4. A couple beautiful kids
 - 5. He has been hailed as the world's best golfer for 15 years and is on a trajectory to prove it.
 - 6. He has the adulation of the poor and corporate elite as well.
 - 7. He plays basketball with Michael Jordan. He goes bike riding with Lance Armstrong. He takes calls from the President of the United States.
- I. Like Solomon – who was the King of Israel during the zenith of her glory
- 1. Who is overseeing a peaceful empire
 - 2. Whose nation has fabulous wealth
 - 3. Who is sought after for his wisdom
- J. Tiger – like Solomon – had it all. And yet both kept looking.
- K. There is a hole in our heart that only God can fill.
- L. One of the first things we learn from Tiger is that the Book of Ecclesiastes is spot on.
- VIII. Number Two: Sin will find you out.
- A. Which is exactly what Numbers 32:23 says: “Be sure your sin will find you out.”
 - B. We may be able to get away with lying and cheating for a while – but like a Ponzi scheme, you can be certain that eventually things are going to collapse.

C. First of all, we will all stand accountable for everything we think, do and say before an all-knowing God.

1. Woods did not just sin against his wife, he sinned against God.
 - a) He violated God's laws.
2. And the frightening thing about the judgment we face is not that we might not get a fair trial, but that we will. He knows everything.

D. But it even goes beyond that, because sin ultimately undoes us.

1. For starters it is progressive.
 - a) And I think this is especially true of sexual sin.
 - b) There is a slippery slope that leads you down a path that is increasingly lewd and brazen.
 - c) Proverbs 6:27f says: "Can a man take fire into his bosom and his clothes not get burned? Or can a man walk on hot coals and his feet not get scorched?"
 - d) Of course the answer is, "No."
2. And, even if we could keep small sins small, over time they lead you a long way from where you want to be.
 - a) Setting aside the fact that one sin generally leads to another
 - (1) You cheat on your wife and then lie to cover it.
 - (2) And one lie leads to five others.
 - b) Sin is self-destructive behavior.
 - (1) It poisons your soul. It hardens your heart
 - (2) It creates distance between you and God
 - (3) It makes you less of a person not more
 - c) No one who could see things clearly would ever chose to sin, because to choose to sin is to choose to suffer.
3. And over time you can't hide this.

E. I doubt Tiger is happy to have been caught like he did, but it may be a real blessing, because the path he was on was not going to lead him to a healthy place.

F. I think Brit Hume was on to something when he said that the question is not whether Tiger can recover as a golfer. The question is, can he recover as a person.

1. He was on the wrong path.
2. He needs to get off of that path.⁹
3. Which leads to point three

IX. Number Three: Success can be very dangerous thing – harder to deal with than a bad golf lie. So – especially if you are doing well - you'd better have good friends to keep you in check.

A. Spiritually speaking, failure is a better option than success, because it keeps us humble.

1. The arrogance and self-importance that can accompany those who become successful – in any arena – and who do not see their desperate need for God and forgiveness. Who start to believe their own press reports
2. The success of these people can be their undoing.

B. Therefore, part of what we need are good friends who can keep us in line.

C. One of the problems people like Michael Jordan, Michael Jackson, Alex Rodriguez, Bill Clinton have is that they have so much money and so many people who want to suck up to them that they begin to believe that they can get away with whatever they want. That they are different.

D. Or – and I don't know if this is the case, but perhaps it's part of the story in Tiger's marriage – the only person who doesn't think they walk on water is their spouse.

E. And that's not a great situation because you do not want a spouse who is trying to pull you down to earth while everyone else is building you up.

F. Look, you do not need Tiger's status for this to be true. All that needs to happen is you need to be in charge of anything.

1. About 15 years ago I remember Sheri saying to me, "you've got some issues to work on and you need better friends who can tell you these things, because otherwise it's all up to me and that is not a great plan."
2. A lot of wisdom there.

3. And about six months ago she said essentially the same thing and I ended up making four different appointments with people and said, “Please do not hesitate to tell me when I’m being an idiot. My job insulates me from some of the criticism that might otherwise come my way.”

4. Now I get plenty of criticism as a pastor because you cannot please everyone. (So I am not asking for the rest of you to sign up). But that is usually about different kinds of things.

G. Tiger either doesn’t have good friends or he doesn’t have the right friends, because he was on a path leading to trouble and from what I’ve been able to tell, no one said, “You are being an idiot and a jerk and this whole thing is going to blow up in your face.”

1. Real friends – the kind of friends every man needs – are those who understand what is going on in your life because you are not hiding it from them, and call you to become a better person.¹⁰

2. In Tiger’s case they would be those who would help him narrow the gap his public and private lives, not perpetuate it.

3. And today we have to seek this out. Be intentional. Between technology, travel and the high levels of male autonomy in our culture we can hide our troubles until we are ruined.

H. Tiger is now pleading for privacy.

1. That’s a little duplicitous for a man who has spent 10 years profiting from selling his image.

2. And what he is really asking for is not privacy but the right to secrecy.

a) He has led a secret life not a private one

3. But, I think that if he had the right friends and shared his life with them that a lot of what everyone now wants to know about could have been stopped.¹¹

X. Well, Tiger’s life provides plenty more to think about. Let me end where we started, with a statement of my firm belief that I could have – still could – make as big a mess of my life as Tiger has of his. And so could you. So:

A. Let’s learn from him

1. The Book of Ecclesiastes is true – Ultimate Satisfaction is found only in God...
2. Sin will find you out...
3. Success can be a very dangerous thing – so you'd better have good friends to keep you in check...

B. And two: Lets pray for Tiger.

¹ Hume was not surprised by the kind of criticism he has received for his statements, but he is a bit surprised at the volume. He also does not believe he would be under any scrutiny if he had said that Tiger needed to double-down as a Buddhist or suggest he switch to Hinduism. "It is Christ and Christianity that gets people stirred up."

²Some, including a website company that arranges affairs (Ashley Madison) have started to argue that having affairs is now tolerated. Apparently that is not the case. Sleeping with a dozen other women while your wife is home pregnant apparently still is viewed as the behavior of a cad. (See Advertising Adultery, by Carolyn Moynihan, 14 December 2009.)

³ Like many women, she is furious with Wood's behavior, but also that of Mark Steinberg, Wood's agent, who has suggested that everyone "give the kid a break." She fires back: His client is 34 years old. He made vows to his wife. He can be expected to answer questions from the police and questions about why he sought out the help of a doctor now implicated in the steroid scandal.

⁴ The term celebrity was coined by Daniel Boorstin in his 1961 book, *The Image*, which was written to chronicle the decline of America. He developed the term to refer to a "person who is known for their well-knownness." He was mocking people who are interested in pretense rather than actual substance. He called celebrities "pseudo-humans." The newer theory on celebrities suggests that it is the new art form – one that competes with and often supersedes more traditional forms of entertainment such as movies, books and TV shows.

⁵ I am not sure how much credit Woods receives or deserves as a pioneer for racial equality. He does not view himself as an African American (his mother is Thai) and is a bit sideways with the African American community (in part because none of his mistresses appear to be African-American). But most Americans would view him as the first African American golf megastar.

⁶ Some have claimed that Woods has been excessively vilified for what many men would do given the chance and for what many athletes do do. Set aside Michael Jordan and Alex Rodriguez, what about Magic Johnson and Wilt Chamberlain who claimed to have bedded thousands of women. Why the outrage over Woods? (For that matter, what about Presidents Kennedy, Johnson and Clinton, Martin Luther King and Jesse Jackson, et al). Perhaps because: 1) he presented himself as a family man; 2) golf has the reputation of being more of a gentleman's sport; and 3) Woods was married – with a pregnant wife at home during much of his philandering - whereas that is not always the case with those listed. Additionally though the press is referring to Woods "affairs," they hardly seem to be that. He was carrying on with multiple women at the same time. His behavior makes him appear both reckless and emotionally distant from anyone.

⁷ Tiger said that he has always expected to be as successful as a golfer as he has been. (That was always the plan.) But, what he did not expect is that success would bring the kind of celebrity and scrutiny of his life that it has.

⁸ Both cheating on his wife and lying to others speak to serious character flaws and make it fair to ask, has he cheated in golf? I suspect he hasn't improved his lie because so many people follow him. But I no longer assume that he's above it. His character shows that he will lie or cheat in some circumstances. If a man will lie to his wife then, he will lie. He is a liar.

⁹ I actually think the other person who may come to illustrate this point if he is not careful is Michael Jordan. His acceptance speech upon entering the Hall of Fame didn't reveal a guy I'd want to spend a lot of time with. Didn't suggest that he was growing as a person.

¹⁰ Tiger has been asking for privacy. This is a bit hypocritical given that he has sold his image for hundreds of millions, but what he really wanted was secrecy. It's OK to have privacy. And he certainly doesn't need to divulge intimate details of his life to the world. But we should not have a secret life, especially not from our closest friends. The healthiest people are those who have very little daylight between who people think they are and who they are.

¹¹ Jewell help him narrow that gap (between public and private behavior) not perpe