

“Echoes of the Heart”

Reflections on Life and Community Living

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Covenantal commitments and Tiger Woods. In the Church (or the synagogue or mosque), to be sure, we are a people of the covenant. A covenant is a relational commitment. In our covenant with God, we support God with our worship, our generosity and our commitment to social justice (i.e., caring for the poor); and God supports us with God’s love, forgiveness and redemption.

Beyond the church, our national life as citizens is also covenantal. The state provides certain services and protections for us. In turn, we agree to obey the laws of the land and, in general, to be of service to our country.

On a personal level, our marriage vows, too, are covenantal. Moreover, our commitments to team, whether at the office or in sports, have a covenantal spirit to them. Biblically, relationally, and even ontologically (who we are in the nature of our being), we are a covenantal people.

As relational beings, these covenantal commitments are binding on us. They are the foundation of our community life.

What this means is that when we sin, we don’t just hurt ourselves. We hurt our covenantal community—our family, to be sure; but also our friends, even the community in which we live. We’re all interconnected.

Tiger’s fall from grace. In terms of consequences, the consequences aren’t just personal; they’re communal. We see this vividly playing out in professional golfer Tiger Woods’ recent *fall from grace*.

Because Tiger has been so successful as a golfer and with his business enterprises, he is both famous and wealthy. Thus, his well-documented infidelities have brought hurt and disappointment—not just to his family and friends—but also to his millions of fans around the world and to his business sponsors and associates.

Some time later this year, Tiger will no doubt return to the PGA tour and to his hot pursuit of Jack Nicklaus’ record eighteen *major* golf championships (at present, he has fourteen). But restoring his public image and rebuilding his marriage are another matter. In both areas, particularly, the latter, he has a steep mountain to climb.

Imagine the depths of forgiveness involved for spouse Elin Nordgren to *take him back!* It can happen. But as he hinted at in his first public appearance a short time back, it won’t be through his words, but through the months and years of life-choices before him.

Considering the consequences. As human beings, why is it that so often we listen to the voice of *immediate gratification* rather than the voice of *probable consequences*? What

keeps us from thinking long-term and pausing to measure the possible consequences of our choices?

If we tell the truth about ourselves, most of the time, don't we know what we ought to do? We know; yet, we allow ourselves to buy into a false reality. False realities are always out there, luring us away from our best self. In religious idiom, we call them *sin*.

There's a poignant story that illumines this for us. It's a reflective conversation between an old Cherokee Indian and his grandson. The old man is telling the boy about *the battle that goes on inside people*.

My son, the battle is between two-wolves inside us all. One is evil, he tells him. It is anger, envy, jealousy, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, resentment, lies, false pride, and ego.

The other is good. The good is joy, peace, love, hope, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith.

The grandson thinks about this for a minute or so and then asks his grandfather: *But which wolf wins?*

To which the old Cherokee replies, simply, *the one we feed*.

Living within the boundaries of our covenantal commitments isn't always easy. To be sure, there are always a host of temptations that can jolt us off track. But *life within our covenantal relationships* is where the ultimate joy is. It's where the deepest meanings of life feed our spirit and affirm our life purpose.