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# **Tiger Woods Lesson... - Guest Article**

## **Tiger Wood's Lesson: Exploration of Shame and Forgiveness**

By: Daryl Green

### **Introduction**

In the 1850 novel *The Scarlet Letter*, author Nathaniel Hawthorne takes the reader on an emotional roller coaster with a moral-laden saga. In a 17th-century Puritan settlement, Hester Prynne bears a scarlet letter "A" on her breast for her apparent adultery. Despite the public humiliation, Hester never reveals her accomplice, Rev. Arthur Dimmesdale. Therefore, she lives her life in public shame.

Tiger Woods may feel like he's bearing his own scarlet letter. It is unthinkable to many individuals that any reasonable person could forgive the alleged transgressions of Tiger. This reality bears out in the court of public opinion. According to a Gallup poll, his unfavorable rating surged up to 57%, compared to only 8% four years ago. Yet, it's easy to speculate about a situation as we watch the unraveling of someone else's life. This article explores how to deal biblically with shame and embarrassment in order to move forward.

### **The Situation**

Public humiliation can damage relationships. As we look at endless news stories about Tiger, many wonder what happened. Tiger may be the greatest golfer in history. However, Tiger's own imperfection has damaged his public persona. On November 25th, the *National Enquirer* published a story alleging Tiger Wood's infidelity. On November 27th, Tiger crashed his Cadillac Escalade into a fire hydrant in his neighborhood without apparent explanation. Shortly afterward, several women claimed they had extramarital affairs with Tigers. Tiger has remained quiet except for his website posting: "This situation is my fault, and it's obviously embarrassing to my family and me." His delayed response to any wrongdoing came much too late. In fact, he may not be able to rapidly repair his tarnished image.

### **The Jesus Strategy**

Forgiveness isn't easy but is necessary for healing public shame. Public humiliation can be defined as "an action that allows an individual's personal embarrassment to become publicly known." Shame is defined as "a strong emotion caused by guilt or disgrace." Elin Nordegren, Tiger's wife, endures an apparent burden; she carries the public shame of her husband's infidelity. Many people speculate that the beautiful supermodel will stand by her man. If she leaves, she would lose her social status and millions of dollars. Yet, others argue that Elin will divorce him. Many wonder if this young wife and mother can forgive Tiger because of the severity of these alleged transgressions.

Forgiving someone is a slow process for many people. Lewis Smedes, author of *Forgive & Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve*, spent a lifetime understanding how people can forgive others. Yet, he did not underestimate the damage caused to the victim: "You can forgive someone almost anything. But you cannot tolerate everything. . . . We don't have to tolerate what people do just because we forgive them for doing it. Forgiving heals us personally. To tolerate everything only hurts us all in the long run."

Some folks would declare that not everyone deserves forgiveness. However, Jesus' forgiveness strategy contradicts this premise. Let's look at Jesus' life. He was mocked, betrayed, and persecuted. Yet, Jesus even asked forgiveness for those who caused his death. Peter approached Jesus on this issue of forgiveness; Peter wanted to know how many times should someone be forgiven. Jesus answered, "I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times." Therefore, forgiveness is something that is measured by the heart, not the head.

### **The Path Forward**

To take back one's integrity from public shame requires a great amount of spiritual courage. Today, public apologies are rather common. Many public figures have used the public relations playbook by announcing their transgression with a contrite spirit in hopes of getting the story behind them. However, the person who caused the

public humiliation does not get off free. In the *Scarlett Letter*, Rev. Dimmesdale's secret sin haunts him in the form of deteriorating health. Likewise, Tiger will continue to be the center of tabloid news and late night talkshow banter. Many wonder if Elin can overcome her hurt and take Tiger back or move on with her own life. Unfortunately, some people can allow this shame to chew up their self-worth, thereby becoming a prisoner of their imperfections. Therefore, this courage must be developed through implementing the Jesus' forgiveness strategy. It is a daily process to think like Jesus.

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