

By now we've all heard about the helicopter crash last Sunday that killed 9 people near Los Angeles. In that aircraft were former NBA superstar Kobe Bryant, and his 13 year-old daughter.

We were living near Media, PA in suburban Philadelphia, when Kobe was becoming a basketball phenom at Lower Merion High School. He graduated the same year our daughter graduated from neighboring Penncrest High School. He had that Philadelphia connection, but his death has touched people all over the world, basketball fan or not. Not only was he a sports legend, but by all accounts he seemed to be a decent person and a wonderful family man who did a lot of good and helped a lot of people.

Much has been said and written about this tragic event. I thought I would add a few reflections of my own.

In the initial news reports we were first told that Kobe Bryant was killed in the crash. Then we learned that his daughter Gianna was also on that flight. For quite a while, we heard nothing about the other 7 people who also lost their lives. (It reminded me of when Pirates legend Roberto Clemente died in a plane crash in 1972. I'm not sure I ever read anything about the 2 or 3 other people aboard that plane, or even learned their names). By now we are learning about "the other 7 people" – their names, their stories, and in some cases how inspiring and remarkable they were.

We rightfully grieve when celebrities die, especially if they are young, or their deaths are under tragic circumstances. But those less famous are just as important and valued and loved: baseball coach John and his wife Keri and their daughter Alyssa, assistant basketball coach Christina, Sarah and her daughter Payton, a teammate on the girls' basketball team, and the pilot, Ara. And every person, everyone of us, is also valued and important and precious to God.

Soon after the crash the National Transportation Safety Board was on the scene, and will be working diligently to determine the cause of the crash. While that will no doubt take months to fully determine, it does appear that weather conditions may well have at least contributed to the accident. There was heavy fog in the area. The LAPD and the Sheriff's Department helicopters were grounded that morning due to the bad weather. If – and I say if – weather was a major factor, that would add grief upon grief. Simply put, maybe they just should not have been flying that day.

We humans make mistakes, have errors in judgment, and make poor choices. Sometimes when that is the case, bad things happen. And when bad things happen we can easily blame God, and get angry at God. Whether or not human error is involved in this crash, I am reminded not to blame God for things in life that may well be the result of our own human limitations, mistakes, and imperfections. When we humans do things that cause suffering, God is grieved too.

And of course, at a time like this, when a 41 year old star is killed, and other adults in the prime of their life, as well as 3 young girls, we are reminded how fragile life is. We do

not know what a day may bring. King David in the Bible said, “There is only a step between me and death” (1 Samuel 20:3). This is not to be morbid, just realistic. I saw on TV one interview with Kobe where a reporter asked him about death, and he talked quite openly and honestly about death, and it being a part of life.

The good news of the gospel is that if we trust in Christ we can face our own death with assurance and hope. Jesus died and rose again that we too can have hope in a meaningful life after death. For those who follow Jesus, death is not the end of everything. It is the doorway to eternal life in heaven with God.

- Pastor Harry