

Kobe Bryant's Death Taught Me to Rethink Fatherhood

This past Sunday morning, when the world learned of Kobe Bryant's tragic passing, I was celebrating the 40th anniversary of Saddleback Church with my family. But throughout the service, as we started to receive alerts about Bryant's death, the mood of the congregation shifted from celebratory to somber. Shaken by the heartbreaking news, I walked out of service to the Sunday school classroom to pick up my daughter, and that's when it hit me. In his final moments, Bryant experienced every parent's worst nightmare: He was with his daughter Gianna as the helicopter came crashing down, knowing that he couldn't do anything to save her.

I've been a Laker fan all of my life, but while walking down to the Sunday school room to get my daughter on that terrible day, it wasn't Bryant or his many accolades that consumed my mind—it was my daughter. I couldn't help but get emotional when she ran up to me with open arms, saw my sadness and asked what was wrong. When I told her the truth of what had happened to Bryant and his 13-year-old daughter, I could see her look at me differently. Her joy turned to sorrow, and what she said to me next will stick with me forever.

Gazing into my eyes, she said, "Dad, that's like if you and I were on a plane together, and it crashed. That would mean it would just be mommy, Landen and Jesse left..." She looked pensive as she finished her thought: "It's a good thing she was with her dad."

As my 10-year-old hugged me tightly, I couldn't stop thinking about how this is what Bryant must have been doing during the last seconds of his life.

Being a father during times like these puts the significance

of the dad's role in the family into perspective. For the rest of the day, I couldn't stop seeing that image of Bryant hugging his daughter as the helicopter fell and thinking of my children. The news of his passing prompted challenging questions from my kids, and I was faced with the option of whether to deflect their real wonderings or take it as an opportunity to tell them some trying truths. Choosing the latter, we started to dive deeper into honest conversations, and in doing so, the crux of their fears was revealed. They weren't afraid of dying; they were worried about losing their dad. The more they thought about what happened to Gianna, the more their empathy for the Bryant family became evident as they thought about what it would be like to be fatherless.

Sometimes, as fathers, we take the simple joys for granted and neglect to value the importance of our presence in our kids' lives. But what Bryant's death and the conversations that spurred show me is that our children need us more than we realize. Sadly, tragedies like the one that took place this Sunday happen every day all the time. Still, many of us need to be personally affected by such an event before we wake up and realize the gravity of a father's influence on his family.

Bryant's sudden passing is a sobering reminder that tomorrow is not promised. We may only have today to be a loving father and show our kids what it means to follow Jesus.

When my daughter looked at me and said, "It's a good thing she was with her dad," I realized something. Even at her young age, my daughter knows that no matter what circumstances she faces, as long as she has her dad, she can get through it. If it were up to me, my kids would never experience pain, but it's far more important that I be there for them every step of the way when troubles come than to try and prevent bad things from ever happening.

As dads, the best gifts we can give to our kids are time, talk and touch. That's how Jesus mentored His disciples all the way

to the cross. Just as His followers did, our children trust us with their lives. It is our responsibility to be the fathers they deserve to depend on and ultimately teach them to trust the Lord above all else. We never know how long we will have to communicate these lessons to our kids, but we can always start now. {eoa}

Anthony Dever is executive director of Every Man Ministries and founder of the “Dangerous Good” conference, a free nationwide event for men that will visit 20 major cities this summer.