

## “Life” Lessons from Commercial Airplane Crashes

On a cold, “better-to-be-inside” day last winter, I spent much of it watching videos that detailed modern (mostly from the 1990’s to the present) commercial airplane crashes. The program fascinated me to the point that I watched one right after the other. The shows carefully described each of the doomed flights from their benign beginnings to their bitter ends in precise detail. Since the episodes were almost entirely comprised of very well done computer generated images, the makers could and did respectfully and graciously omit gory actual footage of the all-too-real carnage. Instead, they focused on the factors that led to the failures.

After being somewhat “glued to the screen” for most of the day, I realized that the **causes** of most of these disasters fell into a few concise categories:

- **Human Error-** The pilot and crew of the airplane, or a combination of them plus the Air Traffic Controller, made definite mistakes. The causes and severity varied, but it was often a combination of several smaller mistakes that would have been relatively insignificant alone, but when compounded, resulted in catastrophe.
- **Mechanical Failure-** Some part or portion of the flight controls became inoperable, or acted in ways contrary to either expectations or inputs.
- **Operational Capabilities were Ignored or Exceeded-** The aircraft was put in situations or circumstances that were contrary to or exceeded its design specifications.

Most, but not all, of the scenarios ended in tragedy with many lives lost, and many others irreparably marred and damaged. But if you think about it, and I sincerely hope you will, the mangled wrecks of our lives are often caused in much the same ways...

1. **Human Error.** Simply put, “life” works not only *better*, but also *much better* when we do it God’s way. *“Good understanding produces favor, but the way of the treacherous is hard.... Poverty and shame will come to him who neglects discipline, but he who regards reproof will be honored... By transgression an evil man is ensnared,”* Proverbs 13:15,18; 29:6. And just like airline tragedies, it is not always one monumental errant decision or action, but a series of “smaller” (in our eyes anyway) ones that, in successive combination, produce catastrophic results. On this point consider King David. From 2Samuel 11, note that: *he wasn’t where he was supposed to be, v.1a; doing what he was supposed to be doing, v.1b; when he saw something he wasn’t supposed to see, v.2; then he went further than he should have gone, v.3; and thus, he did what he shouldn’t have done, v.4.* Any one of these mistakes, alone, likely would not have resulted in the tragedy of a *dead child, 12:15-19; and a murdered husband, 11:6-13.* But in combination, that was exactly the calamitous consequence. If we will just do the *right thing* (what God says) always, we can at least avoid the self-caused, “human error” calamities of life.
2. **Mechanical Failures.** Our bodies, like aircraft, are not meant to last forever; they have a limited life expectancy, cf. Psalm 90:10. Because of this built-in obsolescence, our *parts* malfunction and fail. However, *spiritually* speaking, this is not really the problem of itself. A broken “wing,” a worn-out “landing gear,” or even a failing “hydraulic pump” does not *cause* spiritual crashes; but they can often lead to them. When we forget that our *bodies* are not meant to last forever, or when we start to think that “life” consists of *physical* health and well-being, we may well start to blame God for their failures or lack of maintenance. Then we have a *spiritual* problem that, if left uncorrected, will certainly lead to tragedy! Keep your *physical* parts in the

proper perspective, and never let them- even when they malfunction, cause a *spiritual* crash, cf. 1Timothy 4:7-8; 2Timothy 4:6-8.

- 3. Ignoring or Exceeding Operational Capabilities.** Here, the comparisons between *physical* airplane and *spiritual* human crashes hold true as well. When aircraft are put into situations for which they weren't designed, or asked to do things for which they weren't constructed, catastrophes are inevitable. So too, human *spiritual* crafts. When we *ignore our specified limitations* and/or *exceed our design/construction capabilities*, we going to have a spiritual "hard landing" if not a "terminal impact." How so? When we attempt maneuvers for which we were not designed and constructed, like declaring "right" and "wrong" apart from God, or thinking that He is "unfair" or "unrighteous," we're going into a *spiritual death spiral* from which we may not be able to pull out. Consider Jeremiah 10:23, "*a man's way is not in himself; nor is it in a man who walks to direct his own steps,*" and, "*who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay...?"* Romans 20-21. Such things are fatally flawed attempts to ignore and exceed our design and operational capabilities. As a preacher-friend of mine likes to say, "There are three essential truths: 1) There is a God; 2) I'm not Him; and, 3) Neither are you." Amen, Charles Wright, amen. Our designer/builder gave us an *operator's manual*, and we need to quit trying to rewrite it for our own purposes, AND stop ignoring its included procedures and limitations.

We're not airplanes flying through life, but we need to eliminate as much *human error* as possible, understand that *mechanical errors* are going to occur and thus react to them appropriately, and respect our inherent *design capabilities and limitations*. Doing so will not eliminate every catastrophic tragedy, but it will at least stop the ones we create **ourselves!** (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at [southportcofc.org](http://southportcofc.org); email to [mrpcstrong@hotmail.com](mailto:mrpcstrong@hotmail.com))