

The boy was five years old. His father was thirty three, a diabetic who refused to let a disease control his eating and drinking. Until one day he drank once too often, and the five year olds friends came running with the message, your father's dead.

After the denial and the running home to find out for himself came the tears. Russell Baker was that boy and in his Pulitzer Prize winning autobiography he writes, "Poor Bessie Scott! All afternoon she listened patiently as a saint while I sat in her kitchen and cried myself out. For the first time I thought seriously about God. Between sobs I told Bessie that if God could do things like this to people, then God was hateful and I had no more use for him.

Bessie told me about the peade of heaven and the joy of being among the angels and the happiness of my father who was already there. This argument failed to quiet my rage. "God loves us all just like his own children," Bessie said.

"If God loves me, why did he make my father die?"

Bessie said I would understand some day, but she was ~~more~~ only partly right. That afternoon, though I couldn't have phrased it this way then, I decided that God was a lot less interested in people than anybody in Morrisville was willing to admit. That day I decided that God was not entirely to be trusted

As I read this passage I thought of how we answer the small boys' ~~pass~~ pass.

One says, Everything works out for the best.

Another, God as a reason for taking your father.

Yet another says, when your time comes, your time comes.

Whiles still another would say, God didn't take your father, your father is responsible for his own death by not taking care of himself.

Or one might say, God didn't want your father to ~~say~~ die, he is a God of life, not death, God cries with you.

These are the answers we live by, when death comes they are the answers we die by. Even as we would say with Bessie, God loves us all, just like his

God, as we speak the word we think of the one, all powerful, all mighty, all knowing. Now a sparrow falls without his will we read in Luke. God is love we read in 1 John. So ~~how~~^{how} do we speak to a boy whose Father has died?

Everything works for ~~the good~~^{good} for those who love God, says one. Russell, life is like the back a a beautiful tapestry, threads sticking out here and there, no beauty, no form. But God sees the front and one day we too will see how he weaves our life to make a rich, design. Yes, Russell, the years have brought struggle and tears and pain, it must seem that your father's death was a terrible tragedy, but God had a purpose. You Russell have become a sensitive writer, bringing a deeper understanding of life to hundreds of thousands. Your father's death, it is a dangling thread, but when your life is complete you shall see what beauty it has brought.

Now as I speak in this way some of you say, yes, that is exactly right pastor. God is in control, everything happens as he plans for the good of his own. When suffering comes, when death visits, you have hope, the assurance that the dark clouds will pass and a bright new day will dawn.

There are others, though, and this includes some of you who are here today, for whom this answer seems a mockery. I suspect Russell Baker might find himself in this group. Is God so unfeeling that he can scar a five year old for some larger purpose? All the glory and honors and fame I would trade to have grown a boy with a father to love him and care for him and be with. he might say. The end never justifies the means. To take life, to leave children and widows suffering, there is no beautiful tapestry that can make up for this.

You in this second group^{might} say this to Russell. Russell, God did not take your father's life. Your father chose to ignore his diet, because of his diabetes he suffered the consequences. God did not want you a five year old without a father. But he gave your father the freedom to decide whether he wanted to over eat, and to take a drink, your father's choice led to his death. You know how it is, Russell, sometimes you have been careless when driving, an accident has occurred. You were driving the

car, not God. But God has promised this, Russell, in everything he will work for your good. God works for the good of a five year old who has no father, he will not leave or abandon you.

Russell, this has always been a world full of suffering, of people hurting others and themselves. If God could have his way there would never be a starving child or a wife who is abused, but sin hardens hearts and children starve to death because no one ~~sk~~ cares enough to share. God cries for them, he watches with them through the dark night when there is no one else. God is love.

Russell, once, long ago G^d himself came to live here, a boy. He did nothing but love and waited for all the world to love him in return. And I suppose he would be here still walking among us and talking to us face to face had not people decided otherwise. They killed him, God's own son they killed. It is that kind of world, we are that kind of people. But God took that act of hatred, the killing of his own son and said he would forgive us through it, and give us life. Even in that worst possible thing that we could do, the killing of God himself, God worked for our good. So now that your father has died, God works still for your good, Russell.

Who is right? Those who say every works for good for those who love God or seeing God in control of all, even causing the death of a 33 year old father to bring about good, or those who say in everything God works for the good, believing that though God does not want that death, when it comes God still works to help a small boy?

I don't know. Some ancient manuscripts have it one way with God as the subject, others have it the other with everything the subject of the sentence. I don't know.

I do know this: Bessie Scott was right when she told Russell, God loves us all just like his own children. God is for us and nothing, neither life nor death nor anything else in all the creation can separate us from his love in Christ Jesus our Lord. Answer into the events of our life, these we will never have the answers to, but that God is for us, this we can believe.