

Safe at the foot of the fuzzy cross

By [Ryan Dueck](#)

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Like [the disciples](#), I often have no idea how to pray. I don't know what to ask for, I don't know how long to keep asking, I don't know if I am doing it right, I don't know how it all really works. That doesn't sound very pastoral, I know. What can I say? I suppose I am, at least, in decent (or at least populous) company when I say that prayer is often very hard for me.

What does one do, after all, with the sheer weight of sadness and longing and confusion that so many must carry? What does one do with big, ugly, terrifying words such as "Alzheimer's," "cancer," divorce," "depression," "loneliness," "rejection," or "suicide"? What does one do with phrases like "and that's when we stopped speaking to one another" and "we just don't know where the money will come from" and "I miss her terribly" and "we're going to have to do another test, another procedure?" What does one do with all of the tertiary pain that ripples out from the human stories where these words find their origin? There are only so many ways to say, "God, would you please make all the bad stuff stop and give us some more of the good stuff please?"

For the last few years, I have adopted a somewhat involuntary Tuesday morning tradition. I walk into my office and begin to sift through the evidence of my kids' latest visit. Being pastor's kids, they have to stay longer after church than they would like. So, they often just hang out in my office, drawing, crafting, cutting, gluing, rearranging, creating paper airplanes, preparing notes and other surprises for dad, and generally leaving the place looking like a hurricane blew through it.

One day a few years ago, among the Tuesday morning surprises that I found myself sorting through on my desk was a little cross with a heart in the middle of it. It was fuzzy and colorful and bent a little to the right. Initially, I wasn't quite sure what to do with this curious little artifact, so I just left it on my desk. Then, one day I went to the local Ten Thousand Villages store and bought a simple, little, hand-crafted, brown bowl. I brought the bowl back to my office and put the little fuzzy cross in it. Over the following weeks, months, and years, whenever I found myself not knowing

how to pray or weary of praying, whenever I had a visit from someone with a story or a problem that seemed too weighty for me to carry, whenever I was exhausted or annoyed, or just flat-out didn't want to pray, I would write the person's name on a little piece of paper and put it in my little brown bowl with the fuzzy, colorful cross in it.

Over time, I have grown to really appreciate my little prayer bowl. Whenever I am all out of words for the many hard things people must face, I dump it all before God and I leave it there. Like the friends who made a hole in the roof to drop down their paralyzed friend for Jesus ([Mark 2:1-12](#)). Or something like that. It's my way of saying, "I don't know what to do or say anymore. I'm all out of ideas here. Heal them, fix them, comfort them, afflict them, rearrange and remake them, gladden them, encourage them, bring them peace. Whatever. At the very least, keep them company for a while. They need you."

And then, when I look over at my little bowl full of names and stories being guarded by the fuzzy little cross with hearts on it, I smile. I don't feel like I need words because they are in a place that is good for human stories and human pain. Away from all the words, safe in the care of Christ.

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