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**Steven Croft**

Hello everyone. I'm Stephen Croft the Bishop of Oxford. Welcome to the podcast My (extraordinary) family. For each edition I talk with someone I've come to know in my travels across our diocese and occasionally beyond about their faith about their work and about their story. And I'm asking people what it means to them to try and be more Christlike, more contemplative, more compassionate, and more courageous. Today I'm as close as I can get to Christ Church Cathedral. We're not in the cathedral itself because it's full of scaffolding but we are nearby, and I'm with Michelle Eyre. Michelle thank you for joining me. Michelle is one of the founders of a remarkable website called Discovering Prayer which aims to help people pray through online support. Michelle before I ask you to describe the site tell me something about your journey and your story.

**Michelle Eyre**

I became a Christian in my teenage years when I was a professional dancer. I was at the Royal Academy of Dance and I was inspired really because of people I met who I just thought were amazing people and they invited me to church. So that's how I came to faith originally. Since then I always had a really strong sense of the importance of prayer. I met people who really prayed and it changed their lives and I wanted in.

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**Steven Croft**

And you were, for a time, part of the community at Wantage? [Yes] You became a nun?

**Michelle Eyre**

Yes! So I was a dancer then I was in a Christian company called Springs Dance Company and then went from there... I always have this sense that I needed to pray and that prayer was the most important thing at the heart of things. And of course there are lots of different

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**Michelle Eyre (continued)**

ways that can be worked out. But for me I wanted to go all out. So I 00:01:28  
went into a religious communities at. Wantage. 00:01:33

**Steven Croft**

How long were you there? 00:01:35

**Michelle Eyre**

I was there two and a half years as a novice sister. I loved it. I still love 00:01:36  
the people there. It's a wonderful community. They do fantastic 00:01:41  
retreats. You can go and stay there. They're welcoming, hospitable. 00:01:44  
They're full of life. And I think when I first visited a convent I thought it 00:01:47  
would be crusty, old, dark... but it wasn't it was light and bright and full  
of energy and it felt there was something there that was just so  
special. I wanted to be part of it and it's still there actually. The sisters 00:02:01  
are still there we're great friends. They're helping support 00:02:06  
"Discovering Prayer." Actually it's their prayers that we join into when 00:02:08  
we're praying and that's the point of it.

**Steven Croft**

And what led you to begin "Discovering Prayer" as a website to help 00:02:15  
people pray?

**Michelle Eyre**

I sensed that there was a lot going on in the media about mindfulness; 00:02:19  
people wanting to learn about meditation and I knew there was this  
whole fantastic tradition of Christian meditation but I didn't know  
whether or not anybody else really knew about it. I didn't know of 00:02:34  
anywhere that was really systematically teaching it and saying "Yeah  
this is something everybody can learn". It can help you deepen your 00:02:39  
relationship with God get more in touch with the peace that passes all  
understanding and that isn't about feeling a bit happy here and there  
but is a deep sense of rootedness in God's love and that's what I  
wanted to share with people, and a way of sharing that is to record

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**Michelle Eyre (continued)**

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audio prayer times. So we make recordings and then you're seeing 00:02:57  
praying with a friend. And so it's quite intimate but you can do those 00:03:00  
prayers whenever you like. And if you want just like with this podcast 00:03:04  
you could be listening rushing out and going for a walk wherever you  
like.

**Steven Croft**

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I know a lot of people use it but what's the reach now? 00:03:09

**Michelle Eyre**

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Well at least thirty three thousand people have taken part. We've made 00:03:13  
a podcast for the Archbishop of Canterbury for "Thy Kingdom Come."  
So it's had a massive reach and it's amazing. And now there's a 00:03:21  
community of people that pray regularly so that's the point that when  
you pray with the Discovering Prayer you're praying with a whole  
community of believers. And somehow we all help each other to keep 00:03:33  
going. You know it's like a flock of birds. They fly in a V formation to 00:03:36  
help each other because otherwise they couldn't keep going and that's  
what it's like with prayer. The same with cyclists isn't it? I'm fascinated 00:03:44  
by these cyclist when you see a long distance cycling and they take  
turns at the front [of the peloton.] Yes. 00:03:51

**Steven Croft**

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That's really good. And if I go to the site for the first time if I've never 00:03:54  
used it before. What will I find? 00:03:59

**Michelle Eyre**

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So you'll find lots of information about prayer for a start but also you 00:04:01  
can join the completely we have a Discovering Prayer course and that  
offers five different types of audio prayer time because there are lots  
of different types of Christian meditation, as you'll know, so we don't  
suggest anybody should pray in one particular way we say here's a  
whole recipe list... you could have all these different sorts take what

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**Michelle Eyre (continued)**

works for you and go from there.

**Steven Croft**

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Yeah I went to have a look at the site this morning as I was preparing 00:04:27  
to meet with you. I have looked at it, previously, and I just really loved 00:04:31  
the way it uses the ancient wisdom: Start where you are; use what  
helps; there's no one way to pray. That comes across really simple and 00:04:41  
straightforward and very powerful I think. Is it, as far as you know, is it 00:04:47  
all ages. Is it young people? Are young people using this site? 00:04:49

**Michelle Eyre**

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Yes they are but we are actually under quite a lot of pressure to do 00:04:52  
some resources for children. and I would like to do that. And especially 00:04:57  
night time resources for before you go to sleep so that's in my mind, If  
you like, as a next thing to do. Probably for next Lent actually rather 00:05:06  
than this year....

**Steven Croft**

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There's loads in the news at the moment and people are really 00:05:08  
concerned about mental health and children and young people and the  
possibilities of prayer helping and learning to pray again helping young  
people to navigate through the complexity of the existence of the  
moment.

**Michelle Eyre**

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Critical really, for our time, I think. 00:05:25

**Steven Croft**

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And what surprised you most about the journey that you've taken with 00:05:28  
this?

**Michelle Eyre**

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Well just how many people have got on board and how generous 00:05:33  
people are with their support and their time and their enthusiasm and  
the amazing ways that I've heard of it being used. So really moving 00:05:45

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**Michelle Eyre (continued)**

accounts of somebody using discovering prayer actually right at the end of life when they were dying they were listening to Discovering Prayer very regularly but equally somebody going round and using them at somebody else's house just saying well let's pray because they've been in a bit of a spot and not really knowing where to start with prayer so saying "Tell you what let's listen to the..."

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**Steven Croft**

So people are using it with other people? [Yes.] It's not simply a Solo. 00:06:04

[No it's not.] experience? 00:06:08

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**Michelle Eyre**

It's kind of an online community which is an extension of the religious 00:06:09

life which is the foundation of it all. So that's it comes from. 00:06:15

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**Steven Croft**

So that's all attaching and somehow part of, as you said at the 00:06:16

beginning, the prayer of the community at Wantage and there are other communities you're linked with as well.

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**Michelle Eyre**

Yes. Well of course there's the Frideswide community which is very 00:06:23

near you. That's another new way of being a religious community 00:06:27

which would have a lot of social action in it as well as deep

foundations in prayer but also actually West Malling which is a

contemplative Benedictine community and Mucknell Abbey which I go to regularly as well. [Yes I do too.] It's wonderful. So that's a lovely. 00:06:42

They've all got slightly different flavours that suit different people but 00:06:48

those are ones that have been very close with me.

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**Steven Croft**

And it's a really interesting theme in your vocational journey, how all of 00:06:55

that previous experience and your two and half years of being with the

sisters and a novice sister at Wantage has all worked together. [Yes.] 00:07:07

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**Steven Croft (continued)**

In this vocation to help people to pray.

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**Michelle Eyre**

Yes it is. I thought when I went that I'd never leave. I absolutely was going in for good but in the end I did because of other things I needed to do as well but it really has been a foundation for everything and I would recommend the religious life... go in for a year, go in for a few years, I would absolutely say if you're drawn to it explore it because it's a wonderful thing to do and it will stay with you forever and enhance everything you do.

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**Steven Croft**

We're recording this in a week when the Oxford University chapels have got a Anglican sisters and religious spending a week in different colleges around Oxford, lots were preaching at Evensong last night.

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And it seems that people are keen to explore different forms of

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religious life at the moment which is really, really interesting. I'm asking people as we go through these podcasts something about our

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Diocesan vision to be a more Christlike church, more contemplative, more compassionate, and more courageous. And it might sound an obvious thing to ask you what you've learnt about being more

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contemplative. So I'm not. I'm going to ask what you've learned in this journey about what helps us to be more courageous in our Christian life.

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**Michelle Eyre**

Well, I think there is a touch of if you think you're cool to do something

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and nobody else is doing at all which is how I started out. And I really

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did start by making five recordings and giving them to some friends and then saying well that's a bit tinny sounding so I've got a better

microphone. And then we got professional recorders of course then

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we made more and then it grew. And sometimes when things are

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**Michelle Eyre (continued)**

growing it feels like nothing much is happening. And I think that's 00:08:42  
when the courage is needed because it's sometimes it feels a bit slow  
and you put a load of effort in and you don't know what the outcome is  
going to be. And after a while of course you begin to see some results 00:08:50  
that's quite encouraging. But when you're putting roots down can't see 00:08:54  
any growth. The roots are going down and that God is in the roots and 00:08:57  
will fulfill the best of your knowledge doing what he wants and that is  
pleasing to him. Whether or not you've quite got it right. So that's what 00:09:04  
I take hope from.

**Steven Croft**

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I'm going to invite you to lead us in prayer in a moment but, have you 00:09:10  
got new resources coming to the site for Lent.

**Michelle Eyre**

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Yes we have. We're just about to record some new recordings for the 00:09:16  
Passion and they'll be quite lengthy ones quite a lot of our recordings  
are five minutes, ten minutes, to fit in easily to people's lives. But 00:09:26  
people have asked us for longer meditation. So these ones will be 00:09:28  
actually on things like the crucifixion and washing the disciples feet.

**Steven Croft**

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Michelle thank you and please would you lead us not simply in a short 00:09:35  
prayer but I think in a meditation.

**Michelle Eyre**

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So this is a three minute meditation to help us to connect with God 00:09:42  
today. So whether it's your first time or you've been doing guided 00:09:48  
meditations for years you're invited come to this moment now to God  
to be refreshed and held in his presence. Thank you for taking this 00:10:04  
time to pray here with us the bishop and myself but not just us with  
the whole company of heaven in fact. With God that's leading you on 00:10:17  
with all the other monks and nuns and religious communities around

## Michelle Eyre (continued)

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the world that are praying for you even when you don't know it. Father	00:10:28
this time is yours and all we have we surrender to you, being confident	
in your grace as we take our refuge in you and letting go whatever	
we've been doing before. So take a deep breath and as you can exhale	00:10:46
let go of whatever you've been doing before and be present, now,	
recollected in these few special minutes. For you to be with God. A	00:11:03
reading from the Bible is a start of our meditation. This is what the	00:11:16
Lord Almighty the God of Israel says to all those I carried into exile	
from Jerusalem to Babylon. Build houses and settle down, plant	00:11:28
gardens and eat what they produce, seek the peace and prosperity of	
the city in which I have called you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it,	00:11:45
because if it prospers you will prosper. Now, we'll have a time of	00:11:57
meditation using the words of the Bible. Allow the words to sink in,	00:12:03
stay with a phrase, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I	
have called you. Seek the peace and prosperity of the city that I have	00:12:21
called you. This is our meditation seek the peace and prosperity of the	00:12:29
city to which I have called you. Stay with those words, seek the peace	00:12:44
and prosperity of the city to which I have called you. Continue to focus	00:13:01
on those words for a few moments in the silence. The aim is to be in	00:13:17
this moment with God just listening to his word mine mind wanders. It	00:13:27
doesn't matter. Just come back to the words of the Bible. Seek the	00:13:28
peace and prosperity of the city to which I have called you. Seek the	00:13:40
peace and prosperity of the city to which I have called you. And from a	00:13:45
time of meditating on God's word we now give thanks to God for his	
call at the heart of our lives. Thank you God for blessing us. Father we	00:14:14
thank you that you've drawn close to us in prayer. That you are with us	00:14:26
at the beginning and the end of the day and that you know us so	
deeply. Amen. I'd invite you to notice now how you feel. You've had the	00:14:34
courage to take these few moments out to be with God and you can	



**Michelle Eyre (continued)**

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return here to this place, at home with God, through the day, or for the old moments you have when you're walking in between activities.

Thank you so much for praying with us and believe now the bishop is going to bless us. 00:15:08

**Steven Croft**

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And so may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep 00:15:13

your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God. And of his 00:15:21

son Jesus Christ our Lord and the blessing of God Almighty, the

Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be with you and remain with you

now and always. Amen, 00:15:34

**Michelle Eyre**

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Amen. 00:15:35

**Steven Croft**

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Michelle, thank you so much for taking part in this podcast My 00:15:37

(Extraordinary) Family.

**Michelle Eyre**

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Thank you Bishop Steven. 00:15:43