

Flourishing

An assessment of Discovering Prayer's
'Out of the Cloister' 14-Day Prayer Challenge
funded by the Sir Halley Stewart Trust



ABOUT

Discovering Prayer

**Discovering Prayer was founded
in 2014 to help people build a joyful and
fulfilling relationship with God.**

Many people want to pray but struggle to know how to start. We draw on the timeless wisdom of nuns, monks and those steeped in the Christian monastic tradition to help people to live a more prayerful life. To do that, we produce accessible, high-quality guided audio prayer times and courses that are rooted in scripture and designed to help people make time for prayer, however demanding life may be. In this way, we welcome people into an online praying community and a gentle rhythm of prayer that leads to greater peace and a deeper connection with God.

Over 60,000 have prayed with us to date, and you're warmly
invited to join us at www.discoveringprayer.com.



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In June 2021, Discovering Prayer ran a free 14-Day Prayer Challenge as part of the ‘Out of the Cloister’ project funded by the Sir Halley Stewart Trust. Its aim was to enable participants to hear wisdom from nuns and monks and engage in a rhythm of prayer that leads to flourishing.

A key objective of the project was for Discovering Prayer to learn and develop as an organisation so we can:

- (i) make our prayer courses as effective and valuable as possible**
- (ii) find the best ways to evaluate the impact of a faith-based project**
- (iii) share that learning with others.**

To achieve this, we had the privilege of working closely with Matthew T. Lee, Director of Empirical Research at the Human Flourishing Program at Harvard University. The paper that follows contains his assessment and findings.

Assessment of Discovering Prayer’s ‘Out of the Cloister’ 14-Day Prayer Challenge

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25 September 2021



About Matthew T. Lee

I am an Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the University of Akron; Director of Empirical Research at the Human Flourishing Program at Harvard University; Distinguished Visiting Scholar of Health, Flourishing, and Positive Psychology at Stony Brook University’s Center for Medical Humanities, Compassionate Care, and Bioethics; Visiting Scholar at the Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital; and a non-resident Research Fellow at Baylor University’s Institute for Studies of Religion.

My expertise is in both quantitative and qualitative research methods, I earned my Ph.D. in Sociology, and I am lead editor of *Measuring Well-Being: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from the Social Sciences and the Humanities* and lead author of *The Heart of Religion: Spiritual Empowerment, Benevolence, and the Experience of God’s Love*, both published by Oxford University Press.

Introduction

HELPING A 'CONTEMPORARY AUDIENCE ENGAGE IN A RHYTHM OF PRAYER THAT LEADS TO FLOURISHING'

The organisation Discovering Prayer was founded in 2014 and offers a library of over 200 guided Christian meditations that aims to help people 'experience a deeper relationship with God.'¹ I provided my assistance to help Discovering Prayer design and conduct a research assessment of its 'Out of the Cloister' 14-Day Prayer Challenge. As the name suggests, this two-week online course of guided Christian meditations—delivered primarily as audio files but supplemented with written material, videos, and one livestream event—was intended to share the 'timeless wisdom of monastic communities' to help a 'contemporary audience engage in a rhythm of prayer that leads to flourishing.'²

The course sought to share the wisdom of monks and nuns from several Christian traditions in the UK and United States in order to 'create a free, engaging, online course based on audio interviews (podcast), and guided prayer times, and written material so it is easy for busy people to access.'³ The intention was for participants to use the online materials every day for 14 days and the course was offered in June 2021. Guided practices included: Lectio Divina (Divine Reading), appreciation of beauty, cultivating generosity, using the Jesus Prayer from the

Orthodox Christian tradition, and many others. The course also included two days of rest.

I assisted Michelle Eyre (Discovering Prayer's Founder and Director) and Jo Mitchell (Director of Editorial and Development) with the design of an online survey and qualitative interview guide in order to better understand how participants experienced the course. Discovering Prayer offered all participants an opportunity to take the survey via SurveyMonkey prior to the start of the course, at the mid-point of the course, and after the course. Michelle and Jo also conducted in-depth interviews via Zoom with seven course participants who were selected based on their positive written comments about the course or continuing use of its prayer times. The average length of these interviews was approximately one hour. Many course participants also provided written feedback via email and this report also draws upon this material for those participants who also provided written consent. I had access to deidentified, secondary, survey and interview data, as well as the written comments. In addition, I examined all the online materials provided to participants in the course, which included listening to audio files and watching videos. I was unable to participate in the livestream event, but was able to view the video.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**THE COURSE
'CHANGED MY WHOLE MINDSET'
ABOUT PRAYER AND RELATING
TO GOD**

14-DAY PRAYER
CHALLENGE PARTICIPANT

Executive Summary

I found the online course materials to be of **exceptionally high quality**. The audio and video files were engaging and reflected the remarkable diversity and wisdom of the monks and nuns who provided interviews and joined the livestream event. All of the data collected, including the survey responses, the interviews, and the participants' written comments suggest that—for those who responded—the 14-Day Prayer Challenge was indeed **quite meaningful, even transformative**.

My impression is that the goal of helping a 'contemporary audience engage in a rhythm of prayer that leads to flourishing' **was achieved**. One interviewee stated that the course 'changed my whole mindset' about prayer and relating to God. In fact, many of the interviewee comments were inspiring, as they discussed letting go of habits that inhibited their relationship with God and cultivating healthier habits that deepened their relationship with God. The pre- and post-survey trends were all in a positive direction as well, both in terms of personal flourishing and with regard to the respondent's relationship with God. This is worth celebrating!

The important caveat to this *impression* (and this is why I have not framed it as a 'scientific' conclusion) is that the course completion rate (38%) and the response rate to the follow-up survey (16% of those who took the first survey; 8% of those who started the course on day 1) were both rather low. Although better than many marketing surveys, we cannot assume that those who completed the third (final) survey were similar to those who did not complete it. In other words, it is possible that the completers were especially satisfied with the course relative to the non-completers. Given the relatively low response rate and the non-experimental design of the assessment, we are not able to draw causal conclusions from the survey data. Similarly, the interviewees were not randomly selected, but instead represent a small group of especially engaged participants. However, the convergence of evidence across types of data (surveys, interviews, and written comments) supports the impression that **the course was remarkably effective** for those participants who offered their feedback through one or more of these processes. There are, of course, limits to what we are able to learn from self-report data. But when the goal is to understand people's lived experiences, self-reports are informative.

This project was Discovering Prayer's first engagement with research-based assessment. It was **a great learning experience** and Michelle and Jo were both so thoughtful and engaged throughout the process. In the next iteration, Discovering Prayer might consider raising funds to provide a small financial incentive for participation in all three phases of the survey. Incentives are a standard practice in survey research and help to increase the response rate, which would permit analyses with statistical inference. Funds were not available to provide incentives in the current project and I would recommend seeking such funds in the future. Discovering Prayer might also consider an experimental design with random assignment to 'treatment' and 'control' groups, as this is the gold standard for making causal claims in scientific research. But even without an experimental design, a strong response rate for a follow-up survey would be most helpful for drawing inferences from the data.

Finally, although the 38% completion rate might seem low, this actually compares quite favourably to the normal completion rate in many online courses. It is well-known that 'completion rates in online courses are generally low, averaging around 13%'; other estimates range from 5% to 15%.⁴ It would appear that Discovering Prayer's Prayer Challenge course had more than **twice as many completers** as we might expect based on industry norms. One caveat is that many online courses last longer than two weeks. Another point to consider is that many people derive great benefits from online courses that they do not complete. People often learn what they need to know prior to completing a course. Such people might not fill out a follow-up survey or be counted as a 'course completer', but they might in fact be quite satisfied with their experience with the course.

**THE GOAL OF HELPING A
'CONTEMPORARY AUDIENCE
ENGAGE IN A RHYTHM OF PRAYER
THAT LEADS TO FLOURISHING'
WAS ACHIEVED**



Research Findings

Despite the limitations discussed above, what are we able to say about the people who did provide feedback on the course, either via the online survey, the Zoom interview, or the emailed comments? I will discuss the survey results first. Of the roughly 1,900 people who signed up for the course, approximately 766 participated on the first day. 290 participants listened to the online files on the final day of the course for which content was provided (day 13), which represents 38% of the 766 participants who started on day 1. We can compare these figures with the number of participants who completed each phase of the survey. At baseline, prior to the start of the course, 386 participants took the survey; at mid-point the number was 123; after the course was over the number was 62. The latter figure is most important, in terms of the lasting impact of the course, and represents 16% of those who took the first survey and 8% of those who started the course on day 1. Participants were drawn from several countries, with the majority hailing from the UK (52%), followed by South Africa (25%), then the United States (8%), Ireland (6%), and Canada (1%), with an additional 8% drawn from other countries.

The number of survey items was kept quite small in order to prevent 'respondent fatigue' that might further reduce response rates. To that end, the survey asked the 6-item Secure Flourishing Index, which is a short version of the 12-item measure developed by Dr Tyler VanderWeele, Director of the Human Flourishing Program at

Harvard.⁵ These items are scored from zero to ten as follows:

1. Overall, how satisfied are you with life as a whole these days?

0 = Not Satisfied at All, 10 = Completely Satisfied

2. In general, how would you rate your physical health?

0 = Poor, 10 = Excellent

3. Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?

0 = Not at All Worthwhile, 10 = Completely Worthwhile

4. I always act to promote good in all circumstances, even in difficult and challenging situations.

0 = Not True of Me, 10 = Completely True of Me

5. My relationships are as satisfying as I would want them to be.

0 = Strongly Disagree, 10 = Strongly Agree

6. How often do you worry about being able to meet normal monthly living expenses?

0 = Worry All of the Time, 10 = Do Not Ever Worry

In addition, survey respondents were asked the following items from the 'Communion with God Domain' of the Measure of Christian Spiritual Well-Being⁶ developed by Dr Tyler VanderWeele and colleagues at the Human Flourishing

Program (again, items are scored 0 to 10 with 0 = Strongly Disagree to 10 = Strongly Agree):

1. **I have come closer to God through my prayer and spiritual practices.**
2. **I intentionally seek God's presence in my daily life.**
3. **I am growing in my understanding of who God is.**
4. **I have a meaningful relationship with God.**
5. **God loves me and cares about me.**

Again, with the caveat that the response rate was rather low and we cannot conclude that the online course 'caused' these changes, it is informative to note that mean (average) scores improved for all 11 of these survey items from pre-course baseline to after the course. Scores were generally higher at the mid-point of the course relative to baseline, but this discussion focuses on the pre- to post- differences. The life satisfaction item increased from 6.9 to 7.6 on the 0–10 scale from baseline to after the course. Pre- to post- differences for the other flourishing items were as follows: physical health (6.75 to 7.1), worthwhile things (6.9 to 7.7), promote good (7.2 to 7.5), relationships (6.0 to 6.6), and worry about finances (7.1 to 7.3). Note that a higher score on the financial worry item indicates less worry, so for all items a higher score is preferable. Across all domains, respondents reported greater flourishing after the course compared with baseline. Although we cannot state that course 'caused' these changes, the trends are encouraging and suggest that a more rigorous test of hypotheses is warranted in a future study.

In addition to greater flourishing, the survey reveals that respondents also experienced greater average communion with God scores from baseline to post-course. With the exception of the 'God loves me' item (8.9 to 9.1), the increase in mean (average) scores was even higher for these items than the flourishing ones:

closer to God (7.3 to 8.4), seek God's presence (7.6 to 8.6), growing in understanding (7.3 to 8.3), and meaningful relationship (7.9 to 8.7). I note that the small increase for the 'God loves me' item is partly related to a 'ceiling effect': the baseline score is already so high that there is little room for improvement. The vast majority of respondents already strongly believed that God loved them, but as we will see from the qualitative interviews, this does not preclude transformation in understanding the nature and depth of this loving relationship.

In addition to the communion with God items, respondents were also asked from 0 to 10 'How satisfied are you with your prayer life?'. Prior to the course, the average score was 5.4 and after the course the average score rose to 7.2. This change of 1.8 points represents the largest increase of any of the survey items and seems especially relevant for a course that is, after all, a prayer challenge.

What is the substantive significance of these changes from pre- to post-course? First, although the scores increase over time without exception, we cannot rule out the possibility that this is because respondents whose scores declined or remained relatively stable did not participate in the follow-up survey. One option is to examine the changes in scores for only the 62 respondents who completed the post-course survey. Unfortunately, because of limitations with the SurveyMonkey platform, only a small number of surveys could be linked over time. In a future project, Discovering Prayer may wish to assign each respondent a unique ID code or use a platform that permits linking surveys over time.

Nevertheless, it is encouraging that many respondents did report improvement in flourishing, communion with God, and satisfaction with prayer. In order to understand why this might be the case, we turn to the qualitative data.



IT IS
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IMPORTANTLY, SHE FELT THAT GOD CARED MORE FOR HER BECAUSE SHE DID NOT HAVE TO 'STRIVE' IN PRAYER; SHE FELT MORE 'SHEPHERDED' BY GOD. THE STRUGGLES THAT THE MONKS AND NUNS SHARED IN THEIR INTERVIEWS WERE PROFOUNDLY TRANSFORMATIVE

Interviews

The seven participants who served as interview subjects were uniformly positive in their overall appraisal of the course. Some expressed difficulty with the

sticking with the 'Challenge' (i.e., listening to the audio files every day due to their busy schedules) or that certain activities (e.g., mindfulness) did not resonate. But it is clear that, overall, they found the experience to be quite valuable. In this section, I will share verbatim quotes that illustrate the primary reasons why respondents benefitted from the course. This is not a comprehensive list of all reasons, but these quotes may shed some light on why the quantitative scores improved pre- to post-course, at least for those respondents who participated in the follow-up survey. I will refer to each respondent by an ID number that I assigned to them, since their identity was not made known to me. The respondents were mostly middle-aged, white females, although one was a middle-aged, white male.

The most important experience for interviewee #1 seemed to be moving from 'trying to find God' in prayer to 'just being' with God. In other words, learning 'to rest even in prayer life'. The message that prayer is at least partly about rest was

reinforced throughout the course, particularly by repeating the words of Jesus from Matthew 11:28–30: 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle

and humble in heart, and you will find rest

for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.' These

words were reiterated

throughout the course

by Michelle Eyre and

were amplified by the

insights provided

by monks and

nuns. For example,

this interviewee

mentioned Brother

Ian's advice that 'God

is eternally present',

that the pray-er does

not need to work hard

to find God, but instead

can simply accept that God is

already present and in relationship.

**THE PRAY-ER DOES
NOT NEED TO WORK
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This insight 'hit home' for #1, even bringing tears during the course, as it made 'quite an imprint on my heart'. She found that she can 'live from this place', which brought her closer to God. From her standpoint, this helped to nurture a sense of peace in herself, which in turn led to improved relationships with other people (post-baseline, she scored a 10 on the 'meaningful relationship with God' survey item). This powerful transformation, she said, was encouraged by the humility of the monks and nuns featured in the course, some of whom expressed that they experience 'low mood' at

times. This was refreshing to her, as #1 also experiences bouts of low mood. (Interviewee #2 also highlighted this affinity with the monks and nuns, as she too became more accepting of feeling sad.) #1 stated that her low mood has made it difficult to feel God's love, but the course helped her feel God's love despite low mood. This is **a remarkable contribution to her well-being and her sense of intimacy with God.**

Respondent #2 also appreciated the 'striveless approach' to prayer advocated by many of the online files and also highlighted Matthew 11:28–30. Although she felt that the 'Challenge' aspect of the course created some pressure, she also felt quite a lot of relief in 'coming to terms with the way life is'. This accepting perspective helped her to feel 'less burdened' in life and experience a variety of improvements from the pre- to post-course (e.g., physical health improved from 5 to 7, relationships improved from 5 to '7 or 8,' feeling close to God improved from 7 to 9). Importantly, she felt that God cared more for her because she did not have to 'strive' in prayer; she felt more 'shepherded' by God.

The struggles that the monks and nuns shared in their interviews were profoundly transformative for #2 and their humanness helped her connect with a 'gentleness of rhythm' in her own prayer life.

This theme emerged across interviews, as was no doubt a function of both the down-to-earth sharing by the monks and nuns of their struggles and their willingness to stop striving

and simply rest in God's presence, as well as Michelle's repetition of the passage from Matthew 11:28–30 and related content. All of the files worked together in a most coherent way to convey the course's theme that prayer involves an experience of peace and rest. This seemed like an epiphany to some interviewees and it was reinforced by the gentle presence of Michelle and the monks and nuns. The content is important, but the humility and tenderness with which it is delivered is perhaps

even more important. #2 suggested that learning to become 'more restful' has helped her improve her relationship with a close family member, with whom she has experienced a great deal of relational friction. She described this change as quite 'healing'.

Such powerful experiences of transformative psychological, relational, and spiritual well-being were strongly present in other interviews as well. #3 explained that prayer has been

a difficult aspect of his spirituality, but the course brought 'great relief' in this regard and helped him to just 'listen to God' instead of having to be active in prayer. Although there were multiple other Christian influences during the 14-Day Prayer Challenge (e.g., he listened to hymns on his headphones a great deal as well), he felt that 'things were coming up' in the course that were suddenly 'fitting into place', especially with regard to the inner experience of repentance. This helped a lot with his relationships, as **'people have seen the change in me'** and his score on that domain moved from 2 to 5 from pre- to post-course.

**SUCH POWERFUL
EXPERIENCES OF
TRANSFORMATIVE
PSYCHOLOGICAL,
RELATIONAL, AND
SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING
WERE STRONGLY
PRESENT**

For #4, the biggest change was **a greater sense of stillness and joy** through connecting with the value of 'being still' in prayer. This moved her from an intercessory style of prayer (asking God for blessings for others) to a direct relation with God: a sense that God is personally interested in her and in her life. She stated that 'this is the heart of what I found most valuable', in addition to the sense that she was part of a community that was centered around the wisdom of the monks and nuns. She now finds that she is better able to catch herself before she reacts negatively to others and that her current rhythm of prayer is more 'centered'. This interviewee did note that she was unable to participate in the 'Challenge' due to personal and professional obligations, but that the course was quite valuable even without the daily rhythm.

Interviewee #5 explained that the course provided the 'structure that I need' and was 'a great way to keep me on a consistent path' with prayer. Like #4, she also appreciated the sense of being part of a community, and for her this was partly derived from knowing that others were listening to the files and watching the videos at the same time. She moved from primarily 'scripted prayers' to praying from the heart in a more relational way. This has helped her 'know that I can be silent with God' and she found the Jesus Prayer (the Orthodox practice of silently repeating a phrase such as 'Have mercy on me') especially helpful. Several other interviewees also mentioned receiving benefit from the Jesus Prayer. As a result of the course, **she feels God's presence more immediately**. She said that 'I feel

immense peace now' with God and that she is more 'calm and relaxed'. She noted that her experience with silent prayer during the course helped her pray without self-criticising. She explained that her mental health improved, and her relationship survey score rose from 4 to 7.

#6 stated that her Prayer Challenge experience was 'really positive', that Michelle's voice was soothing, and that she was encouraged to pray by the monks and nuns because they helped

her to not get emotionally upset if the prayer does not seem to 'work' by conventional standards of success. She now feels more 'secure' in her relationship with God, more content with uncertainty in life, and closer to God. She has been using Discovering Prayer materials every day.

The final interviewee, #7, summarised her experience with the course by stating that it has been 'such a blessing'

and that **'the Challenge was wonderful, encouraged me to relax...**

and enjoy intimacy with the Lord'. She would definitely recommend it to others and felt that 'the content was excellent' and 'the nuns and monks were peaceful and relaxed'. She noted that her background was 'dysfunctional' (e.g., her father was an alcoholic) and that it has taken her 'whole life to come to terms with God'. Her score on the satisfaction with prayer life survey item improved dramatically, moving from 2 to 7. The reason, like many of the other interviewees, was that she felt like she was praying in a 'wrong' manner, but going through the Challenge helped her enjoy prayer, stop striving, and just be with God.

AS A RESULT OF THE COURSE, SHE FEELS GOD'S PRESENCE MORE IMMEDIATELY. SHE SAID THAT 'I FEEL IMMENSE PEACE NOW' WITH GOD AND THAT SHE IS MORE 'CALM AND RELAXED'.

THE ORTHODOX JESUS PRAYER 'JUST BLEW ME AWAY' AND MICHELLE'S APPROACH FOSTERED A STRONG SENSE OF 'PEACE AND STILLNESS'. THE COURSE 'CHANGED MY WHOLE MINDSET': PRAYER IS NOT ABOUT ACHIEVEMENT, NOT ABOUT 'GETTING IT RIGHT', NOW SHE IS ABLE TO JUST ENJOY GOD, APPRECIATING QUIET MOMENTS IN PRAYER RATHER THAN STRIVING.

She further stated that the Orthodox Jesus Prayer 'just blew me away' and Michelle's approach fostered a strong sense of 'peace and stillness'. The course 'changed my whole mindset': prayer is not about achievement, not about 'getting it right', now she is able to just enjoy God, appreciating quiet moments in prayer rather than striving. Interestingly, her score on a sense of closeness with God declined over the course of the Challenge, but she attributes this to becoming more accurate in her self-awareness (i.e., her baseline score was inflated). This highlights the value of qualitative interviews for understanding the reasons why survey scores change over time. A declining score is not necessarily a negative, as it might indicate greater self-awareness and a path of real growth.

Taken as a whole, the interviews offer a powerful demonstration of the value of the Prayer Challenge. The people who consented to an

interview, admittedly a self-selected group of 'success stories', help shed light on why the course is able to enhance a person's sense of flourishing and sense of communion with God. Many interviewees felt that to some extent they had been praying in a misguided way, having to strive, feeling disappointed when prayer experiences did not meet their expectations, not resting in God's presence, not relating to God in an intimate way. The course, drawing as it did on a variety of prayer practices and the wisdom of monks and nuns who participated in interviews, seemed to give them permission to 'just be' with God and also provided guidance on how to do that. The humility evident in Michelle's presence, as well as the presence of the monks and nuns (and her interactions with them), seems decisive in fostering this outcome. Their new ways of praying then **fostered well-being in other aspects of their lives, such as their relationships with other people.**

INTERVIEWS



Written Feedback

In addition to the survey responses and the interviews, all participants were invited to share written feedback on the course via email and 26 consented to allow their feedback to be shared in this report. This statement further illustrates the profound impact of the course on a participant:

'Each day, I feel as though I am entering into a holy place, like a chapel where the door has been purposefully left open, for me to enter in. It feels wonderfully personal (just for me) but also like His big open arms welcoming me into a beautiful sense of the community of God. It feels Heaven-sent and connecting with such precious, deep roots of faith, is just what I have needed. I have tears in my eyes as I write, as only Jesus knows how very much I have needed this.'

Others were similarly effusive in their praise:

The course 'has reminded me of the importance of not rushing—taking time to be still in God's holy presence and waiting on him'.

I am learning—stop. Be still. Notice being in the presence of God. Encountering God through others, through the blessings that surround us.

I've thoroughly enjoyed and been inspired by the prayers and interviews shared.

I am finding [the course] helpful and challenging. The interviews are giving a lovely refresher course in different types of prayer. They are challenging me to use more varied methods during the day.

I always find these [prayer] times helpful and really like the pace and openness of these guided prayer times.

As a person who has an awful time getting to grips with prayer I have or am beginning to see a light at the end of the tunnel as to the how's and when's. Thank you and please continue as I am a fruit on the branch.

There are plenty of other examples like these. This extended quote captures the tone of many:

This course 'comes at just the right time for me, as I have been feeling quite stuck in my prayer life, and spiritual path in general; with a lot of cares partly to do with the COVID situation, but also other personal concerns, and painful regrets. My overall feeling is one of uncertainty which seems to permeate everything, and I have been aware that I don't know how to move forward. I am finding the sessions... reassuring and affirming, in that my own understanding and experience of prayer accords very closely with the approach so far being offered, and also gently challenging in showing me ways to focus better, to gain some structure and shape and actually more fundamentally to recognise prayer as a real living relationship that merits much more care and attention than I have been giving.'

WRITTEN FEEDBACK

Finally, Michelle created these 'word clouds' which represent some of the most frequently used words in response to the survey question, 'What word(s) would you use to describe your current rhythm of prayer?' At baseline, the word cloud looked like this:



After the course, the cloud looked like this:



Only 62 respondents completed this item on the post-course survey, compared with 380 at baseline. So the fact that words like 'erratic' and 'sporadic' appear in the baseline but not the post-course cloud might reflect the fact that the inconsistent pray-ers dropped out of the course or did not complete the post-course survey. It is also possible that the course itself helped participants find a more regular rhythm of prayer. As stated previously, a different research design could help us understand which of these two options accounts for the differences in the word clouds. I hope that Discovering Prayer will seek funding to carry out such a design, as the preliminary findings from this quite modestly funded study are encouraging indeed.

Conclusion

THIS IS A MARVELLOUS COURSE AND ONE THAT IS WELL-WORTH REPEATING WITH A RESEARCH DESIGN THAT WOULD ALLOW FOR A TEST OF CAUSAL HYPOTHESES

This report has assessed the Discovering Prayer 14-Day Prayer Challenge course using the available data: surveys, interviews, and written responses. In addition, I have reviewed all of the content and I can appreciate why the course works for those for whom it works. The kind, gentle, humble presence of Michelle (the narrator in the audio prayer times and the interviewer of monks and nuns) and the monks and nuns themselves was quite winsome and uplifting. The variety of prayer practices was eclectic, and no doubt offered something new for many of the participants. The sense of community engendered by the 'Challenge' aspect (the sense that 'we're all in this together') was also helpful to some participants. In other words, this is a marvellous course and one that is well-worth repeating with a research design that would allow for a test of causal hypotheses.

Despite the various caveats, my assessment is that this course is **thoughtful, excellent, and transformative**. I hope that it will be offered to a broader audience in the future and that a higher level of rigour might be employed in the assessment process. Michelle, Jo, and everyone at Discovering Prayer should be quite happy with the impact on flourishing and communion with God that this course has already had on the participants, as documented collectively by the survey results, the interviews, and the written feedback. This is a strong foundation for the next step in the research process and I am delighted to have assisted their important work.

CONCLUSION

This work was undertaken by Discovering Prayer and was funded by the Sir Halley Stewart Trust. The views expressed within this report are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Trust.

¹ Retrieved on 25 September 2021 from <https://discoveringprayer.com/>

² These quotes appear in a summary document describing the Prayer Challenge provided to the author on 18 March 2021, by Michelle Eyre, Discovering Prayer's Founder and Director.

³ Supra note 3.

⁴ See, for example, 'Social eLearning: A Strategy for Increasing Online Course Completion Rates' (<https://www.novoed.com/resources/blog/elearning-social-completion-rates/>) and 'Moving From 5% to 85% Completion Rates for Online Courses' (<https://www.edsurge.com/news/2019-06-06-moving-from-5-to-85-completion-rates-for-online-courses>)

⁵ Details about the original 12-item measure and supporting documentation can be found here: <https://hfh.fas.harvard.edu/measuring-flourishing>. Readers interested in taking the 12-item measure are able to do so via the free online 'Flourishing App': <https://hfh.fas.harvard.edu/flourishing.app>

⁶ This measure is available from:

<https://cdn1.sph.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/603/2020/01/SpiritualWellBeingChapter.pdf>

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