**Sermon Notes – Sunday 8th January**

**‘Hannah – Encountering God in prayer’**

As we start this new series on ‘Encountering God’, in your group share together your experience of times when you have known God particularly close or conversely, strangely distant.

**Read the account of Hannah in 1 Samuel 1:1-21**

* Consider some of the cultural backdrop to this story and the emotions and feelings of 2 wives competing for the love of one husband. Imagine yourself in that situation and consider how conflict might arise in such an arrangement?
* How did Hannah’s experience of childlessness affect her? (Put yourself into her shoes and imagine life for her.)
* Most of us have experienced *longings* in our lives, possibly the same as Hannah’s or of a completely different nature. How have you managed the intensity of that longing? What has helped/hindered you?
* Twice in two verses (v5,6) God is attributed as having ‘closed her womb’ and is therefore responsible for her anguish of heart. How does that rest with your understanding of God as loving, kind and compassionate? (What is God up to in this situation?).
* Has there been an occasion when you were going through intense longing and could not understand why your prayers seemed to go unanswered? Share how (with hindsight) you have found purpose in your suffering or perhaps it continues to remain a source of struggle and mystery (be honest!).
* Has your own experience driven you deeper into seeking God in prayer or further away from him? What has been the result?
* What is the purpose of prayer and how do we engage in it?
* Like Hannah, we can struggle with the way God is working in our lives (through the experience of suffering we might have to endure). What does God give us to strengthen and sustain us particularly if we cannot see the favourable outcome we desire (and that Hannah received v18-20)?
* In this week of prayer, what little steps might you take to seek God’s presence more intentionally in your daily life and have a fresh encounter with him?

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