



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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**To Know Him By Name<sup>1</sup>: *El Shaddai***

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**Scripture: Genesis 17:1-7**

### INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

When trouble strikes, we often take it personally. Yet at other times when we're going through things that are hard, we feel lost and alone. God seems distant, not personal at all. Many have told me: "*God's not personally interested in me. How could He be when there are wars in Afghanistan and elsewhere? He has much bigger fish to fry than paying attention to what's going on in my life.*"

I read this week in *How To Survive the Economic Meltdown<sup>2</sup>* that one of our greatest tendencies during a meltdown or crisis is to withdraw from God and from friends. [Which is why we have to look out for each other. If someone is not showing up, we should be concerned that this is what they're doing—given that the church is all about our *vertical relationship to God* and our *horizontal relationship to each other.*]

Why this resistance? This reticence? This pulling away from the One who can meet our deepest need? Could it be that we don't really *know* our God. We don't fully comprehend or understand His great power and might. . .nor His fierce love and unspeakable tenderness. . .that He loves and cares personally about each person in the universe.

As a result, we don't really have *confidence* in Him—enough to place *trust* in Him.

Most of us suffer from a low (inadequate) view of God. Add to that the fact that we live in a culture where people are skeptical of (absolute) truth, power, and authority. The idea of a "Higher Power" is not in vogue. . .we are our own "higher power".

Our eyes cannot physically "see" God, and we "look through a glass darkly"—meaning that our understanding of God is very sketchy and hazy. Like fog on a windshield early in the morning...

[Which should remind us that He is indeed God. For if we could grasp all that God is...get our minds around His...figure Him out, He wouldn't be God anymore!]

Nevertheless, He has given us some very clear pictures of Himself in the Scriptures—in particular, in the Hebrew names contained in the Old Testament.

By one accounting, there are at least 30 names or titles for God (i.e.: conservative estimate). Each one paints a picture. For example:

- *El Shaddai* = God Almighty

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<sup>1</sup> The title of this sermon series comes from a beautifully done book by Kay Arthur by the same title—published in 1995 by Multnomah Books. It contains striking graphics and descriptions of 15 names of God.

<sup>2</sup> By Patrick Morley, author of *The Man in the Mirror*, Chapter 2. Published by Man in the Mirror Books, 2009.

- *El Roi* = God who sees me
- *JHWH* = I AM who I AM [Figure that one out. You can't even pronounce it.]
- *Elohim* = My Creator
- *El Elyon* = Sovereign Ruler of the Universe

The names of God are given to people like us—because so often we look up from our most painful experiences and conclude that God is nowhere near. . .that death is stronger than life.

But each of these gives us some facet of God's character. . .an insight into WHO He is. Even if we can't know everything there is to know about God, we can know Him to be the all-sufficient One...creator...redeemer...trusted friend...protector...healer...provider—and much more.

\*\*All that God wanted to say about himself is contained:

- In the names He calls Himself throughout the Bible == WORD PICTURES He gave us
- In Jesus == The WORD (PICTURES) BECAME FLESH

That's why we're going to look some of the Hebrew names for God over the next few weeks during Advent—so you can see how much like His father Jesus is. My prayer is that God will show you more of Himself. . .that you will get a bigger picture of Who He is. . .and a greater understanding of what He is up to (not only in your life and your family's life, but in His world).

## EL SHADDAI

We're going to start with one of the most well-known ones—made familiar by songwriter Michael Card. The song was sung for us just a few minutes ago. It has two parts:

- **El** is a Hebrew term that is typically translated “*God*”
- **Shaddai** is usually rendered “*Almighty*”

~ So, **El Shaddai = God Almighty.** ~

But there's a lot more behind those two words that I want to unpack this morning.

Actually there are two more titles for God in that song:

- **El-Elyon Adonai** which means “*God most high*” or “*God in the highest*”
- **Erkamka Adonai** which is taken from Psalm 18:1 (“*I love you, O Lord*”).

So, they were singing “God Almighty! God in the highest! We will love You, O lord.”

Now, the title *El Shaddai* first appears in the story of Abraham and Sarah—way back in **Genesis 17**. When Abraham first hears this name, it puts him flat on his face. God gives him an amazing promise re. the establishment of the Jewish people—a plan so immense and so enormous that it would take “God Almighty” (*El Shaddai*) to pull it off. That's exactly who God identifies Him-self to be in this passage. This is how it happened. . . . .

*<sup>1</sup>When Abram was 99 years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am **God Almighty** [Heb. *El-Shaddai*]; walk before me and be blameless. <sup>2</sup>I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." <sup>3</sup>Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, <sup>4</sup>"As for me, this is My covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. <sup>5</sup>No longer will you be called **Abram** (=exalted father); your name will be **Abraham** (=father of many), for I have made you a father of many nations. <sup>6</sup>I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. <sup>7</sup>I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.*

Abraham was 99; Sarah was 89. They were childless. Was it a conscious choice for them? We don't know; but given the culture, I doubt it. When it's not a conscious decision, being childless can be devastating. And now they're up in years. In fact, Paul, writing about this in Romans, quips that Abe was “*as good as dead*” (Romans 4:19). ☺ How was such a promise going to be fulfilled in this seemingly hopeless situation. At this point, God reveals Himself as *El Shaddai*.

- 1) The “**el**” stands for one who is *mighty / powerful / strong*. We’re not talking about violence or warrior-like strength here; we’re talking about a father with strong arms who can scoop up his boy/girl, and they know they are safe in his arms.

But there’s another side to this term. . .one you might find surprising:

- 2) The “**Shaddai**” comes from a word which means *maternal breast*; another similar word means “*one who is enough*”. Shaddai is one who nourishes / supplies / satisfies. Every mother here will understand this term. When your baby is crying and is restless, only you (to be specific, your breast) can quiet your child.

So, it is God as SHADDAI who supplies what no one else can.

It is God as SHADDAI who satisfies when nothing else in all the world will—when money, material things, pleasure, partying, success, accomplishment, even that “special relationship” won’t go the distance to satisfy the deeper longings of your soul—and leave you with emptiness and unfulfillment (“there’s gotta be something more”).

It is God as SHADDAI who quiets the unrest, the “colickiness” in all of us.

And it is God as EL who has the wherewithal to provide for our deepest needs.

Look back over your life. Think of all the things you just gave thanks for this past week. the things that are really important in your life. . .that drive your life. . .that make your life rich and meaningful. Only an all-powerful, all-sufficient, one-who-is-enough God can bless like that.

But, you say, “I haven’t been blessed like that; maybe others have, but not me.” Sometimes we feel like God has passed us by.

At a point in Israel’s history, they thought God had forgotten them. El Shaddai (through the prophet Isaiah in **Isaiah 49:15-16**) re-assured them with these words:

“Can a mother forget her nursing child,  
And have no compassion on the child she has borne?  
Though she may forget (unthinkable; unimaginable), I will not forget you.  
See, I have engraved you on the palms of My hands.”

It’s not just the mother-image; the father-image is there too. If you are—or remember being—a kid who was skinny or overweight (and the kids made fun of you). . .a tomboy who was always falling out of trees, getting into fights, crashing your bicycle. . . .maybe you remember running to your daddy. And hopefully you were (or are) fortunate enough to have a daddy to hold you. [Some of you are fortunate to be that sort of daddy.]

Maybe you are years beyond childhood and hurting again (very deeply). All of the hurt, loneli-ness, regret, pressure, and weariness is getting to you. Maybe you need a dad to run to. You know, Jesus in the New Testament said we could call God *ABBA* == father, daddy.

I wonder this morning, is God your El Shaddai, your Abba? If so, you know where to run. You know you need someone stronger than you are. That doesn’t mean you are weak; just that you’re up against some people-places-things that are more powerful than you. You need Him to embrace you, uphold you, protect you. You need somewhere to run when you are hurting and afraid.

When I was 13, on my knees at a youth camp in Ohio. I met my El Shaddai. Time and time again, I have found Him to be my all-sufficient, one-who-is-enough God:

- He held me through the divorce of my parents;
- He held me through the death of Carol, my first wife;
- He held my family as we seemed to splinter and fragment for a time;

- He held Marcie & me in the loss of Billy;
- He holds me through times of self-doubt, and feelings of inadequacy. . .through times of being overwhelmed. . .through times of uncertainty over the future.

You too can find that kind of refuge in El Shaddai. He is our Rock, our refuge, our very present help in time of trouble. Everything you & I will ever need can be found in the all-sufficient One, God Almighty. **\*\*This is the truth that the title EL SHADDAI proclaims.\*\***

## CONCLUSION

Barrenness was only the first of many challenge the old patriarch ABRAHAM and his wife SARAH faced. There would be other tests to come—tests that would push them to the utter edge of human endurance. But from that time on they knew where to run for strength.

Many centuries later, the Apostle Paul would discover the same truth when the Lord told him [cf. **II Corinthians 12:9-10**]:

*<sup>9</sup>“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in (your) weakness.” “Therefore”, Paul said, “I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may dwell in me. <sup>10</sup>That is why I can endure weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”*

Next time you are faced with what seems humanly impossible, run—run to Him. Don’t turn into yourself and withdraw. Remember: *When you’re feelin’ so alone. . .When there’s no comfort in prayin’. . .When feelings fail. . .In your most desperate hour, He will be the strength that you need. . .His grace will be sufficient for you.*<sup>3</sup>

God Almighty—El Shaddai—has all the might, strength, and power you’ll ever need! AMEN!!!

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<sup>3</sup> “Growing”, words and music by Wayne Watson. Found on his CD *The Way Home*.