

El Shaddai

Recently, I thought about accumulating a list of all of the things I cannot do, in other words a list of my limitations. As I considered what would be on that list, it should not surprise anyone that the longer I reflected, the lengthier it got! It's hard to face our limitations. For instance, I had dreams of becoming a major league baseball pitcher when I was young. Whenever, the San Francisco Giants would play, I would take my transistor radio (some of you are asking, "What is a transistor?"; go ask one of your grandparents!) to my backyard in sunny California and pitch every ball the Giant's hurler threw corresponding to Russ Hodge's play by play call of the game. My dad saw my interest and was soon excitedly encouraging me on with countless hours of playing catch. He had played some minor league ball in the South, so his ability and instruction proved very helpful. As I got older and eligible for Little League, I tried out and actually made a major's team. At first, it was a strange feeling; I was shy and self-conscious, but I rapidly adjusted to being the center of attention on the pitcher's mound. It was like home to me, a natural fit. I had no problem concentrating on the batter and no one else. Little League turned into high school, and as I grew taller and stronger so did the speed of my fastball, the break of my slider and the number of strikeouts. High school simply became the opportunity to play baseball in the spring. By this time I was dreaming "big time". Towards the end of my high school "career", however, I hurt my arm. Some of my friends had decided to play a pick-up softball game. I was playing shortstop; without warming up I fielded a ground ball and fired it to first as hard as I could and snap! Something happened in my elbow. It throbbed for weeks. My parents were going through marital problems which were soon to end in divorce, so I did not want to bother them with my sore arm. I tried everything from cold packs to heating pads. I thought that it would just get better. It didn't get better; so along with the pain caused by my family's disintegration I experienced the evaporation of my dreams. I was faced with two apparently insurmountable limitations, the healing of my arm and my parent's marriage. Like the vain attempt to restore my arm, as hard as I tried to talk my parents into reconciling, I was unsuccessful. Since then that list of limitations has only gotten longer. While our culture would like to ignore humanities' limitations, believing that we can do and/or fix anything, the reality is that when it comes to most things that really matter, we are helpless.

I am sure Abram was beginning to feel that way. God had promised him a child through whom would come many descendants who would in turn populate the promised land. But he was 99 years old. Sarai's scheme with Hagar had backfired and by now she was past childbearing years. (18:11) But God was still making promises! It is in Genesis 17 that God reveals Himself as God Almighty, *El Shaddai*. In the face of Abram and Sarai's obvious limitations God proclaims that it is not up to them. He

announces loud and clear (are you listening?) that “**I will establish** My covenant between Me and you.”(17:2) and “**I will multiply** you exceedingly.” (17:2) and “**I will make** you the father of a multitude of nations.” (17:5) and again “**I will make** nations of you, and kings will come forth from you.” (17:6) and “**I will give** to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings.”(17:8) After introducing Himself as El Shaddai He gives a long list of “I wills”. He can; Abram can't!

The Hebrew root of Shaddai is sketchy at best. The possible meanings vary from the traditional interpretation of almighty to more modern understandings that include destroyer and God of the mountains. What they all have in common is the sufficiency of God to supply, provide protection, or give aid. As we grow more and more familiar with Abram's story, this man of faith is learning these very things. Abram's limitations are in stark contrast to El Shaddai's lack of limitations; He is the God of limitless power. You and I cannot even imagine what it would be like to be without limits. Yet, that is the very essence of the Almighty. He is not limited by anything other than His own marvelous nature. In Genesis 17 El Shaddai links this revealing name with the covenant that He is making with Abram. This can be said of all the patriarchs of Israel: specifically to Abraham, Gen 17:1; to Isaac, Gen 28:3; and to Jacob, Gen 35:11, 43:14; 48:3. For Abram and Sarai, God displays that He is the Almighty by renaming them both. In the Old Testament naming of someone or something showed ownership. Abram and Sarai were God's chosen servants. As servants of God Almighty they were going to first hand experience His sufficiency in the face of their inability. El Shaddai was about to open Sarah's (her new name) womb and a child would be born to her and her old man husband, renamed Abraham. Later, God informed Moses, *“I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name, LORD, I did not make Myself known to them.”* (Exodus 6:3) The time for Yahweh to be given would be 400 years later but El Shaddai was given for the patriarchs. When we stop and think about this, we must conclude, how appropriate. When Israel was few in numbers, really just a big family, they needed to know El Shaddai. The acknowledgement of their own limitations would cause them to run to Him all the faster, setting an example for future generations.

How about you? Have you faced your limitations? Have you admitted that you are powerless to accomplish the calling and work that God wants to do through you? The Apostle Paul knew full well where Kingdom ability came from. He wrote to the Philippians, *“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”* (Philippians 4:13) It was not that he could do anything and everything (the lie of our culture) but instead everything he did was accomplished through God's supply of strength. It was Paul's prayer life that revealed the acknowledgement of his own limitations. After teaching and preaching according to the strengthening of God's supply, he prayed for God's power to be known by those that he taught and preached to. He knew that he was powerless to accomplish the internal work of God that he so desired for others, just as he was powerless on his own to fulfill his Apostolic calling. (Ephesians 1:18-19a) Our

Lesson Six/Names of God/group

prayer life truly reveals whether or not we have faced our own limitations and acknowledge the sufficiency of God Almighty, El Shaddai. Consider, bowing today, and confessing your inability and exalt His sufficiency.

Assignment:

1. Read Genesis 17:1-9. What are your impressions, keeping in mind all that has gone before in the life of Abram?
2. What was Abram's response to God's revealing name in verse three? What is Abram acknowledging in his response? In verse nine what would give meaning to Abram's bowing in verse three?
3. What did El Shaddai change Abram's name to? What does that name mean (see the cross reference column if you have one)? What is the significance of this name change?
4. How does 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 apply to God's name, El Shaddai?
5. Are there any misconceptions about God that El Shaddai clears up?

6. We who have been saved by grace through faith often try to live the Christ life by our own efforts. We often try to perform our way to righteousness. In so doing we end up living under obligations (ours and others) and service quickly turns to exhausting duty. All the pressure of being “successful” or “helpful” falls on our shoulders because everything hinges on our effort. This is a graceless life. Evidently what we believed about our deliverance from the penalty of sin did not apply to our ongoing Christian walk. What light does El Shaddai shed on this dilemma?

7. Has God revealed Himself to you as El Shaddai? What has that meant in your life?

8. Write a response to El Shaddai. Talk to Him about how this name is like a strong tower. When you run to Him you are safe. How can the revelation of this name protect you?