

We are looking at the names of God. If you look at our banners you will note that we have looked at two names so far:

- The Creator [*Elohim*] reflects the creative powers of our God.
 - God Most High [*El Elyon*] invites us to look up to God.
 - Today we look at a third name for God: God Almighty.
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Do you like our banners? I called one of the people who are making our banners this week. She had caller ID and she knew the call was from Pontoppidan. She figured it was me calling about a banner. She answered the phone by saying, “What? What Pastor Doug? What do you want!?”

So, other than attitude, our banner makers are doing a great job, don't you think! The banners represent a lot of time committed. Someday I might tell you all who the people are who are making our Name of God banners for us! I do thank them!

The third name of God: God Almighty. In Hebrew it is the words: “*El Shaddai*.” I want to put up three Bible verses on the screen as we begin talking about *El Shaddai* this morning:

- Verse 1: “*Awesome is God in his sanctuary, the God of Israel; he gives power and strength to his people. Blessed be God.*” [Psalm 68:35] Circle the words: power and strength.
 - Verse 2: “*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*” [Philippians 4:13] Circle the words: I can do all things.
 - Verse 3: “*But those who trust in the LORD will find new strength... They will walk and not faint.*” [Isaiah 40:31] Circle the words: will find new strength.
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The first time *El Shaddai – God Almighty* – is used in the Bible is when Abram is 99 years old. I think he is a little weary, a little tired, a little lacking in strength and power.

It is at that moment in time that God comes to Abram – and to us – with the name that means: “*I am God, and I can handle anything that comes your way.*”

Abram sees the obstacles ahead, the problems, the possible wrong turns and the resultant dead-end. God comes and says, “Abram, despite all the problems you see – despite your weariness and your emptiness - I am God and I can handle it.”

At the end of an email I received earlier this week was a tag that said: *“Do not tell God how big the storm is... Tell the storm how big God is!”* That is what the name God Almighty is all about.

- Don’t just tell how big the illness is... Remember how big God is.
 - Don’t just tell how overwhelming your problems are... Remember how overwhelming your God is.
 - Don’t just tell how mighty the obstacles in your way are... Remember how almighty your God is.
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24 years earlier, Abram was a young man – only 75. The Lord appeared to him and called him to travel to a new land and a new life.

Abram – yes, I said “Abram” for that was his name at that time – Abram accepted the leadership of God.

In the next 24 years it was a rollercoaster life for Abram and Sarai. We will not go into the details but this is the outline of the ups and downs Abram and his wife’s life during those years:

- They had to leave the promised land because of a famine.
 - They had to deal with family issues with Abram’s nephew Lot.
 - They had times of great personal disappointment.
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Speaking of ups and downs in life: how was your life this week? Did you have anything at all in your life like Abram’s?

- **Did you feel like you had to leave the Promised Land this week because of famine?**

Think of the Promised Land you sometimes have to walk away from: It might have been a college degree or a job that had to change. It might be a purchase you had hoped to make, or a bill you had hoped to pay off, but it did not work out.

Famines are not just famines of the stomach. Famines are emptiness. In addition to stomachs being empty, hearts can also be empty; dreams can be empty; spirits can be empty. Sometimes the Promised Land can be so far away.

- **Did you, like Abram and Sarai, have family or living issues that did not work out this week?**

I have an ongoing conversation with my kids. They tell me someday they are going to write a sure bestseller, and they are going to title it: "Living With the Dad Who Ruined My Life." I tell them I am going to write an even better bestseller titled, "A Life Restored: The Day My Kids Left Home."

There is humor there but there is also truth. Family life is not always an easy life. Abram and Lot had to part company in order to remain friendly family. Lot took the best land and left the worst land for his uncle Abram. That must have caused stress!

Family life is often a time of stress. It is part of the ups and downs of life.

- **Did you, like Abram and Sarai, have any great personal disappointments this week to deal with?**

Answer: who doesn't! John Cheever the author once said, "The main emotion of the adult American who has had all the advantages of wealth, education, and culture is disappointment."

Harry Fosdick said these words of great truth: "Some night in everyone's lifetime we come home to find a new guest there – disappointment."

The great disappointment for Abram and Sarai was not having a child. Your disappointment? I do not know what it is. I just know that, like me, you have them. It is a part of the rollercoaster.

What does God want us to do when we feel far from the Promised Land, when we have to deal with personal issues, when we have great disappointment?

What are we to do when we are weak and tired and empty, and it is 6 AM and the day is just starting? What are we to do when we do not want to walk through the door, or we do not know how to handle the challenge that looms before us?

Let me remind you of what happened to Abram and Sarai... God appears before Abram, and says...

"I am God Almighty: walk before me, and be blameless. ²And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.' Then Abram fell on his face..." [Genesis 17:1-3]

1. When life gets tough: Fall on your face.

It is OK to fall on your face. We all eventually come to the end of our rope or strength or power. And just because we come to the end of our strength, it does not mean that it is finished.

Remember that first Bible verse? *"God gives power and strength to his people."* When we fall on our face before God – when we worship and get connected to God – there is strength that God gives.

The First Step of AA is to accept the truth of these words: "We admitted we were powerless --- that our lives had become unmanageable." I took out the word "alcohol" because this is the first step for all people.

If you want God's power and strength in your life this week for the challenges ahead, first of all fall on your face and acknowledge your weakness and God's strength.

2. When life gets tough: Walk by faith.

God knows that Abram has had some difficulties during the past 24 years. God knows that you have had some difficulties.

A couple of Sundays ago I said something about it being a tough week at Pontoppidan because of two deaths of members. Before I left the Church that day four other people told me about deaths of their loved ones – family members and friends.

If I said today: it has been a tough week because my --- child, my wife, my finances, my work, my blood pressure [pick the one] --- then I would probably hear from a dozen other people before the week was out saying, “I know what you mean.”

Life is difficult, and God knows the particulars about your life.

- But God does not say: “OK, your life is tough: I have nothing more for you.”
- God does not say: “I have nothing for you; take a week off, run away, do the best you can, good luck, you are on your own.”
- God never ever says, “I have nothing more for you. This is it.”

Remember that second Bible verse at the beginning of our time together? *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”* That is God’s word to us. And we experience that strength when we do what God said to Abram, “Walk before me.”

- When we don’t think we have the strength to face another day, God gives us the strength.
 - When we don’t think we can forgive that person one more time, God gives the power.
 - When we don’t know if we can make the changes we need to make, God opens unexpected doors.
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But God says take a step. Watch it happen. Take a step in faith... I watched – I admired – a man at a nursing home this week. He did not know I was watching. He stood up from a chair. Then he looked at his left leg and said, “You first.”

Power came to that man, and he took a step. That is what God Almighty says to you and me this day. Paul said, *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”* Almighty God gives the power of the first step.

3. When Life gets tough: Remember that Shaddai means God can handle any situation.

It is not just you taking a step. It is God giving the power – making things change.

It was at this time that God changed Abram's name to Abraham, and Sarai's name to Sarah. I think that was to remind them that God was making changes in their lives.

So here is the deal... When we came to worship today, did we come expecting that nothing will change? Did we come expecting that God would say, "I have nothing more for you." If so, nothing will change.

Or did we come today looking for strength and power from our God?

God has strength for you today: Do you need strength and power in your life. God Almighty invites you to do these three things:

- Fall on your face before him – get close to him, grow in him.
- Take a step of faith this week – try a new door, greet a new person, make a change in your habits, join a support group, volunteer to do something unexpected, stop wasting your time and resources with ... [TV, gossip, a person who drags you down, etc.]

You know what step of faith you need to take this week. If you do not, ask a trusted friend! As God Almighty said to Abraham, "Walk before me."

- Expect God's power and strength to change something in your life. Remember the third verse at the beginning of this message? *"But those who trust in the LORD will find new strength... They will walk and not faint."*

May God bless your walk of faith this week, as God Almighty – *El Shaddai* – gives you strength and power. Amen.