Lesson 4 - El Shaddai – God Almighty

Genesis 17:1-23

Heart Talk

When you meet with your small group, share something about your continued experience of being silent for 5 minutes before God OR share something about the Heart Therapy Exercises from Lesson 2 or 3; using music, giving God some undivided attention in praise and worship OR writing a letter to God expressing your desire to trust his Word rather than your feelings or circumstances. Did you sense God saying anything to you? How do these exercises help you experience God? Are you taking time to do the Heart Therapy exercises? To be silent before God? If not, why not? Ask others in your group if they find the exercises meaningful.

Introduction

El Shaddai (el shad-DI) is translated God Almighty in English and is found about 50 times in the Old Testament. At first glance, we might think that this name for God means the same thing as El – God of Power and Might that we studied in Lesson 2. However, Shaddai means another type of power and might than the name El means. The Almighty of Shaddai means specifically that God has the power to keep his promises or that God has the power to do what he says he will do – especially if the promise seems humanly impossible.

Heart Preparation

Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him (Psalm 37:7). Before you begin this lesson – and to prepare your heart to receive what God has for you – sit quietly before God, in silence, for 5 minutes. (It might be helpful to set a timer so you can focus on God and not the passing of time.) During this time, don't try to accomplish anything other than just being quiet with God. If your mind wanders, gently bring it back to focus on God, saying something like, Here I am, Lord or I belong to you, God.

Try to do this exercise of silence one other time during the week. We are trying to cultivate a quiet heart before God so that we can sense his Presence and hear his words spoken to our hearts in spite of the noise and distractions of life.

Jesus' Encouraging Words to You . . .

I Am speaking in the depths of your being. Be still, so that you can hear My voice. I speak in the language of Love; My words fill you with Life and Peace, Joy and hope. I desire to talk with all of My children, but many are too busy to listen . . .

A Prayer to Help Prepare Your Heart

Spirit of the Living God, the One who comforts, strengthens and encourages me.
I admit that I cannot understand the truth found in God’s Word with only my mind.
I agree that spiritual truth has to be understood with my heart as well as my head.
So I ask You to give me spiritual understanding as I do this lesson.
I pray that You would enable me to see, hear and understand, with my spirit, all that You want to teach me.
I ask this in the powerful Name of Jesus (as if Jesus were asking it). Amen
Questions

Read Genesis 17:1-22. (You can read background information on Abram in Lesson 3, Question 1.)

Covenant – The idea of covenant is really not known in our culture, but in Old Testament times, the complex concept of covenant was the foundation of social order and community relationships – and God used this concept to demonstrate his commitment to keeping the promises he made to certain people in the Bible. A biblical covenant is a clear statement of God’s purposes and intentions expressed in terms that bind God by solemn oath to perform what he has promised. Unlike a contract, a covenant that God makes does not expire; it is a permanent agreement that God is obligated to keep, even after the death of the person with whom the covenant was made.

1. Genesis 17 is the narrative of God, again, appearing to Abram to confirm his covenant or promise to him that was first made about 25 years before this appearance. Fill in the chart below, listing the main components of the covenant that God made with Abram.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Components of the Covenant</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17:4</td>
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<td>17:5</td>
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<td>17:6</td>
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<td>17:15-16</td>
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<td>17:19-21</td>
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♥ What parts of this covenant (17:4-8) would be impossible for a human being to promise and then guarantee their happening? What does this reveal about God?

2. Genesis 17:1 is the first time in the Bible that God revealed himself as El Shaddai – God Almighty – the God who has the power to keep his promises (see Introduction). Why do you think God chose this time in Abram’s life (and not before) to reveal himself as El Shaddai (17:17)?

♥ Why did God wait until Abram was 100 years old and Sarah 90 years old (17:17) to fulfill his promise of giving them a son? What does this reveal about God and the promises he makes?

♥ Can you think of a promise that God has specifically spoken to you either through his written Word or through the Holy Spirit to your heart? Did he keep his promise? Will he keep his promise?

♥ What was Abraham’s response to the presence and voice of God (17:3, 17)? What do you think caused this response? How do you usually sense God’s presence and voice? What is your usual response?

3. From what we have learned about the use of names in the Old Testament, what do you think was the significance of God changing Abram’s name to Abraham (17:5) and Sarai’s name to Sarah (17:15-16)? (Abraham means “father of many nations” and Sarah means “princess.”)
Do you think it is important to remember and be reminded of God’s promises? Why or why not? How has God reminded you of his promises? What do you sometimes do to remember God’s promises?

What did God require from Abraham as a sign that he believed and accepted God’s “impossible” promise (17:9-11)? Can you think of some reasons why God would require this outward, permanent mark from Abraham and all his descendants? As New Testament followers of Christ, what are some practices required of us that may serve the same purpose as circumcision in the Old Testament?

God revealed himself to Abraham as El Shaddai – God Almighty, in the context of making Abraham a promise. A promise is a solemn pledge to perform or grant specified things. The value of a promise depends upon the reliability and trustworthiness of the person who makes the promise. A promise can be conditional, requiring a certain response from the one who receives the promise in order for the promise to be fulfilled; or unconditional, meaning no response is required in order to receive what is promised. The Bible is full of God’s “very great and precious promises” (2 Peter 1:4), given to those who believe. The name El Shaddai reminds us that God can and will keep his promises.

4. Read the verses listed below and record what you learn about God keeping his promises.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>God and His Promises</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Numbers 23:19</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Samuel 15:29</td>
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<td>1 Kings 8:56</td>
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<td>Psalm 89:34</td>
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<td>Hebrews 10:23</td>
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Do you equally believe the promises that different people make to you? If not, what makes the difference? How does this apply to believing God’s promises?

Why does God make us promises in his Word? What do you think is his motivation? What do his promises reveal about us? About God?

When you are experiencing hard times, is it easy or difficult for you to believe God’s promises of help? Are you more apt to doubt God’s ability or his willingness to fulfill his promises? Why do you think that you sometimes don’t receive what God has promised?

5. Abraham’s faith in El Shaddai to keep his promises was not perfect (Genesis 16) or without struggle – but in the end he believed that God was who he said he was and would do what he said he would do. Read Romans 4:18-22 and describe the steps in Abraham’s process of faith.

From these verses in Romans, write out the verse that contains the meaning of God’s name, El Shaddai.

When God makes us a promise, we could place our trust in our own abilities, in faith itself, in the promise itself, or in God himself. Discuss with your small group the differences between these four options. How do we place our trust in God alone to fulfill his promises?

When have you had to wait a long time before God acted in your circumstances? Why doesn’t God always act quickly? How does waiting affect you? What can we do while we wait?
Heart Therapy

Spent some quality time with El Shaddai - God Almighty...

Choose a promise from Scripture, either one listed above or another one of your choosing. Take some time to internalize the promise; ponder it, memorize it, journal it, expressing your need and helplessness.

How will you respond to this promise in faith? You may want to use the following steps:

Proclaim - State the promise in the first person, as if you were speaking to God (You, I, me, etc.).

Pray - Express your need to God and ask him to give what he has promised.

Praise - Praise and thank God for his provision, his generosity, and his willingness and ability to give.

Place your trust in El Shaddai - God Almighty. Live as if his promise is true. Continue to believe and obey.