

A worship resource for an event on aging together

Sharon Brown

Gathering

Prelude

Welcome

Call to worship (2 Cor. 4:16)

So we do not lose heart.

Even though our outer nature is wasting away,
our inner nature is being renewed day by day.

Hymn: O God, our help in ages past (*Hymnal* 328)

Experiencing the Word

First story: Abraham purchases a burial place for Sarah (Gen. 23)

¹Sarah lived one hundred twenty-seven years; this was the length of Sarah's life. ²And Sarah died at Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan; and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. ³Abraham rose up from beside his dead, and said to the Hittites, ⁴"I am a stranger and an alien residing among you; give me property among you for a burying place, so that I may bury my dead out of my sight." ⁵The Hittites answered Abraham, ⁶"Hear us, my lord; you are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places; none of us will withhold from you any burial ground for burying your dead." ⁷Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites, the people of the land. ⁸He said to them, "If you are willing that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and entreat for me Ephron son of Zohar, ⁹so that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he owns; it is at the end of his field. For the full price let him give it to me in your presence as a possession for a burying place." ¹⁰Now Ephron was sitting among the Hittites;

and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, of all who went in at the gate of his city, ¹¹“No, my lord, hear me; I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it; in the presence of my people I give it to you; bury your dead.” ¹²Then Abraham bowed down before the people of the land. ¹³He said to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, “If you only will listen to me! I will give the price of the field; accept it from me, so that I may bury my dead there.” ¹⁴Ephron answered Abraham, ¹⁵“My lord, listen to me; a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver—what is that between you and me? Bury your dead.” ¹⁶Abraham agreed with Ephron; and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver that he had named in the hearing of the Hittites, four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weights current among the merchants. ¹⁷So the field of Ephron in Machpelah, which was to the east of Mamre, the field with the cave that was in it and all the trees that were in the field, throughout its whole area, passed ¹⁸to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the Hittites, in the presence of all who went in at the gate of his city. ¹⁹After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah facing Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan. ²⁰The field and the cave that is in it passed from the Hittites into Abraham’s possession as a burying place.

Response

Mother: O Lord, who cares about where you’re buried? We aren’t so old that we have to worry about that. After all these years of working and penny-pinching, don’t you think we deserve to have some fun now that we’re retired? I wonder if we could afford to go to Florida next winter or take a Mediterranean cruise. Thank you, Lord, that we aren’t really old yet.

Daughter: O Lord, Mom and Dad are both retired now, and I can see they’re getting older. Last week my friend’s father had a stroke, and they don’t know if he’s going to make it. He’s only sixty-seven. I wonder if he made any funeral plans. What if something should happen to Mom or Dad? I don’t know if they have a will or have even thought about where they want to be buried. You know how much Mom hates

talking about anything to do with getting older, much less stuff like where they want to be buried. Please, Lord, help me find a way to start talking to them about these things.

Hymn: You are all we have (*Sing the Journey* 29)

Second story (Gen. 27:32–41): Jacob steals his brother’s blessing

³²His father Isaac said to him, “Who are you?” He answered, “I am your firstborn son, Esau.” ³³Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, “Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate it all before you came, and I have blessed him?—yes, and blessed he shall be!” ³⁴When Esau heard his father’s words, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, “Bless me, me also, father!” ³⁵But he said, “Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing.” ³⁶Esau said, “Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright; and look, now he has taken away my blessing.” Then he said, “Have you not reserved a blessing for me?” ³⁷Isaac answered Esau, “I have already made him your lord, and I have given him all his brothers as servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him. What then can I do for you, my son?” ³⁸Esau said to his father, “Have you only one blessing, father? Bless me, me also, father!” And Esau lifted up his voice and wept. ³⁹Then his father Isaac answered him:

“See, away from the fatness of the earth shall your home be,
and away from the dew of heaven on high.

⁴⁰By your sword you shall live,
and you shall serve your brother;
but when you break loose,
you shall break his yoke from your neck.”

⁴¹Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, “The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob.”

Response

Father: O Lord, when I look in the distance I’ve started seeing double. The doctor has made an appointment with

the specialist for me to get my cataracts removed. What if something goes wrong? I could go blind, and then I'd lose my driver's license. But if I don't have the surgery, they'll take away my driver's license anyway. Whoever called these the golden years wasn't old. My kids are so busy. I wonder if anyone can drive me home from the specialist. Lord, could you help me find someone to go to the specialist with me?

Son: O Lord, I sure hope Dad's got his will in order. That's one way we could avoid some conflict after he goes. I don't want my dear brother to accuse me of trying to get more than my fair share of the estate. You know Dad's been looking worried lately. When Mom was alive, I could always go to her to find out what was going on with Dad. I sure miss her. O Lord, do you think I should try to talk to my Dad about what's bothering him?

Hymn: You are all we have (*Sing the Journey* 29)

Third story: Ruth refuses to leave Naomi (Ruth 1:8–18)

⁸But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back each of you to your mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. ⁹The LORD grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband." Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. ¹⁰They said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people." ¹¹But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? ¹²Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, ¹³would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the LORD has turned against me." ¹⁴Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

¹⁵So she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." ¹⁶But Ruth said,

“Do not press me to leave you
or to turn back from following you!
Where you go, I will go;
Where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people,
and your God my God.
¹⁷Where you die, I will die—
there will I be buried.
May the LORD do thus and so to me,
and more as well,
if even death parts me from you!”

¹⁸When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

Response

Widow: O Lord, wasn't Naomi lucky to have someone like Ruth in her old age? When John and I got married, I was sure we'd have a bunch of children, but that dream died a long time ago, and now John is gone too. You know, some have been saying I should remarry, but I don't want to. John was sick for so long. All those years of taking care of him—what if I married again and he got sick too? I'm getting old. It may not be long before I need someone to look after me. I would be so grateful, Lord, if you could send someone like Ruth into my life.

Pastor: O Lord, two funerals this week, and two more widows at church on Sunday. I wonder if I'll be one of them someday. I'm so glad they have children in the area. It's the ones who don't have children that I have been wondering about. I visit and they always seem so glad to see me, but I'm no replacement for children. I keep wondering if there's more the church could or should be doing for these people. Lord, please help me hear what you are saying to the church today about all these single seniors.

Hymn: You are all we have (*Sing the Journey* 29)

Closing

Prayer

Hymn: God of our life (*Hymnal* 486)

Note

This worship resource is a companion piece for the article in this issue of *Vision*, “Practices That Help Us Take on the Hard Conversations,” by Mark Diller Harder. All scripture texts are quoted from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Hymn numbers refer to these collections: *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press; Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press; Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1992); and *Sing the Journey* (Scottsdale, PA: Faith and Life Resources, 2005).

About the author

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