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I need some help this morning. I brought a number of animals with me, but I have a problem. They've never been named, and I need your suggestions on what to call them...

Imagine you had the task of naming all the animals in your neighborhood. How would you sort through the many possibilities and select just the right one?

Have you ever thought about the strange names that some animals have? For example, aardvark. It has a few other names, such as African ant bear, but the Afrikaans word *aardvark* means “earth pig” or “ground pig.” This name makes sense since the aardvark is part of the pig family. I don't know who came up with this particular name, for the animal has been around for at least 5 million years.<sup>1</sup>

It appears the task of naming animals has been around a long time, for according to the story in Genesis, the first human had the task of naming the animals. Even his name has an interesting story, for the Hebrew word *adam* comes from the Hebrew word *adamah*, meaning dirt or earth. Do you hear

the play on words between *adam* and *adamah*?

Adam is not really a name, but more of a description of how we originated—from the earth. Some have suggested other translations as *dusty* or *mud-baby* to capture this earthy nature of our original as humans.

In the story in Genesis, God brought all the animals to *adam* to find him a helper. The Hebrew word עֲזָרָה (E-zer) is often translated as “helper,” which is also used in reference to God, as in Psalm 54:4: “But look here: God is my helper; my Lord sustains my life.” Psalm 72:12 proclaims: “Let it be so because he delivers the needy who cry out, the poor, and those who have no helper.”

The word carries a sense of companionship, a partner who works alongside us helping in times of need. So, God brought all the animals to *adam*.

“How do you like this one? It has a long nose to eat ants. Maybe you could develop a taste for ants as well.”

“I'm not sure about that idea God. I think it looks like an aardvark, so that's what I will call it,

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but I'm not sure it would make the best partner for me. I think I would prefer a different diet than ants. Do you have another suggestion?

"How about something that flies in the air, such as this beautiful bird?"

"I agree, God. This is a beautiful creature, and I think I will call it an eagle. Since I'm not able to fly, I would not want to hold the eagle back from enjoying life, so this isn't the right partner either. Maybe someday people will see it as a hopeful image for their group of people. Any other ideas?"

"This is one of my more interesting animals, complete with black and white stripes. This coloring took a lot of detail work to create all the precise lines. What would you like to call it?"

"I think the name zebra fits this one, and I agree that it's beautiful, but I'm looking for something a bit more like me."

As the story goes, one by one God brought all the animals, and although they were wonderful, none of them seemed to be the right partner for *adam*. So, when *adam* went into a deep sleep, God

formed a new partner from the human, and when *adam* awoke and celebrated this new partner, the human used a play on words to describe this new relationship:

"This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called *נִשָּׂא* (*issah*), for out of *אִשׁ* (*is*) this one was taken." In the Hebrew language of the Bible we can hear the play on words: *issah* and *is*. It's as though the first human, called *adam*, was split in two to form two new creatures: *issah* and *is*. The narrator sums up the relationship by suggesting, "This is the reason that a man leaves his father and mother and embraces his wife, and they become one flesh" (2:24 CEB). The narrator seems to suggest that the longing we feel for companionship has been built into us from the very beginning of our origins, a longing for a human partner that brings us wholeness once again.

That doesn't mean that one can only find wholeness in the traditional forms of marriage, for many single people find wholeness in their lives

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through relationships with friends. Families come in all forms, with same sex couples finding wholeness with their partners too. The Genesis story illustrates that we humans need one another in creation. Our world is built on relationships, for we interact and interrelate in so many ways throughout each day.

But we're also related to the world, for the creation story in Genesis 2 begins with God wondering who would till the ground. Once the plants had been created, God placed *adam* in the garden to till it, to care for it. We sometimes have an idealistic vision of the garden—a luxurious place of comfort and no responsibilities, but the story indicates that God placed us in the garden to work, to care for the earth.

Sixteen-year-old Greta Thunberg lives out this idea in her concern for the earth. She arrived in New York City from Sweden a few weeks ago to speak at the United Nations Climate Action Summit, along with other world leaders who will discuss plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in our atmosphere. Rather than flying on an airline and

contributing to more emissions and heat in the atmosphere, she took a two-week trip, along with her father, across the ocean on a sailboat, which included electronic systems powered by solar panels and underwater turbines.<sup>2</sup>

What's even more interesting is listening to Greta tell her story about how she became concerned about the environment.<sup>3</sup> When she was 8 years old, she first heard about climate change or global warming, something she discovered “that humans have created by our way of living.” She said,

I remember thinking it was very strange that humans, who are the animal species among others, could be capable of changing the Earth's climate. Because if we were, and if it was really happening, we wouldn't be talking about anything else.<sup>4</sup>

Greta noticed, however, that no one seemed to be talking about the problem, and she wondered, “If burning fossil fuels was so bad that it threatened our very existence, how could we just continue like before?”

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When she turned 11, she became ill with depression and stopped talking and eating, eventually being diagnosed with Asperger syndrome and selective mutism, meaning she only speaks when she thinks it's absolutely necessary. She has chosen to use her words to speak about the dangerous path we humans are walking, a crisis where "up to 200 species [are] going extinct every single day, that the extinction rate today is between 1,000 and 10,000 times higher than what is seen as normal." She wondered, "Are we knowingly causing a mass extinction?"

In response to this terrible news about the environment, when school started in August 2018, rather than attending classes, she decided to have a sit-in outside the Swiss parliament to protest that her government is ignoring the issue. She wondered why she should go to school and prepare for the

future when no one seems to care that the future may not arrive due to the rate we're destroying our planet. "The climate crisis has already been solved," she explained. "We already have all the facts and solutions. All we have to do is to wake up and change." In response to her protest, over 100,000 school children joined her school climate strike movement called *Fridays for Future*.

Greta has taken to heart God's invitation to be a caretaker of the garden, a global garden larger than the writer of Genesis could have ever imagined. With the rate of extinction occurring in the world, will future generations encounter aardvarks to zebras or only read about them in history books? This teenage girl invites us to think how we can help tend the garden, how we can care for this wondrous home we call our Earth.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.ted.com/talks/greta\\_thunberg\\_the\\_disarming\\_case\\_to\\_act\\_right\\_now\\_on\\_climate#t-61456](https://www.ted.com/talks/greta_thunberg_the_disarming_case_to_act_right_now_on_climate#t-61456)

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<sup>1</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aardvark>

<sup>2</sup> Verena Dobnik, "Teen activist sails across Atlantic to go to climate meeting," *The Elkhart Truth*, August 29, 2019, A8.

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.ted.com/speakers/greta\\_thunberg](https://www.ted.com/speakers/greta_thunberg)