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While a family enjoyed eating their food during an afternoon picnic, one of the children noticed an ant crawling onto their blanket, heading toward the food. “Watch out,” she exclaimed. “An ant wants our food. Who invited it to our picnic?”

Dad replied, “Well, we’re the visitors. The ants live here, and they get hungry too.”

His son asked, “Why so many ants, anyway? They just crawl around everywhere.”

That opened an invitation for Dad to offer a few facts about ants, and knowing his children liked math, he asked, “How many ants do you think live on the earth?”

His son replied, “Probably millions,” and his daughter chimed in, “I bet billions of ants, for I see them crawling everywhere.”

Dad replied, “20 quadrillion. Or another way to think of the number is 20,000 trillion.”¹

“That’s a lot of ants,” his daughter replied. And then his son exclaimed, “Maybe that’s why I sometimes get ants in my pants—they’re everywhere.”

Dad explained, “Here’s another way to look at that huge number: If you paired all the people on the earth with ants, every person would have 2.5 million ants.”

Then came a theological question from one child, “Why did God make ants, anyway?”

Dad replied, “Ants dig tunnels and keep the soil stirred up and loosened so plants can grow and to help the water to drain. Another thing: when small animals die, ants remove them.”

“They’re kind of like housekeepers,” his daughter exclaimed, “but instead of dusting and picking up toys, they play in the dirt pick and up dead stuff!”

Sometimes we may wonder why certain insects or animals exist on the earth, but in the story from Genesis, we read that after creating the heavens and the earth, God exclaimed, “It is good.” That includes the sun and moon, dirt and water, animals and people. We’re all interconnected. All integral parts of the whole.

Just imagine a world without ants: soil too packed to grow plants, and since ants also serve as

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food for many animals and birds, the food chain would be in big trouble without tasty ants for them to eat. We're all interdependent, and if we remove one creature, it could be like tipping one domino and watching them all fall.

Walter: That sounds terrible!

Doug: That voice sounds familiar.

W: Of course it does. It's mine!

D: Hello, Walter. Many of you may remember my friend, Walter the Wolf, who visits with us a from time to time. It's good to see you again.

W: I heard you were going to talk about the importance of ants, but what about wolves? We're important too. You wouldn't want us to disappear either.

D: Yes, of course. Wolves are important.

W: We eat deer and elk, which helps keep their population from getting overcrowded. In addition, we leave behind part of our meal for others to eat.

D: That's very nice of you, sharing your food.

W: We also have a strong sense of family. Did you know we stay with the same mate throughout our lives?

D: That's quite a commitment.

W: We can also hear very well—up to six miles away, and it's a good thing we hear so well.

D: Why's that, Walter?

W: To hear you humans coming. We're endangered, and if we disappear from the earth, the food chain could crumble without us keeping the deer and elk population in control, for they like eating the same food you feed your cows and other livestock.

D: Thanks, Walter, for reminding us that in addition to being interconnected to the ants, we're connected to you too.

Not only do the ants and wolves realize we're interconnected, but that's something William Shatner discovered as he took an actual trip in space with Blue Origin, designed to take tourists beyond the atmosphere of our planet. Shatner you may remember as Captain Kirk on the *Star Trek* series, and when he took a real trip into orbit around the Earth, he began crying.

He explained, "I didn't know what I was crying about. I had to go off some place and sit down and

think, what's the matter with me? And I realized I was in grief.”

The emotion has been called the “overview effect...a cognitive and emotional shift in a person’s awareness, their consciousness and their identity when they see the Earth from space. They’re at a distance and they’re seeing the Earth ... in the context of the universe.”

Shatner said, “I wept for the Earth because I realized it’s dying. I dedicated my book, *Boldly Go*, to my great-grandchild, who’s three...and in the dedication, say it’s them, those youngsters, who are going to reap what we have sown in terms of the destruction of the Earth...It’s a little tiny rock with an onion skin air around it. That’s how fragile it all is. It’s so fragile. We hang by a thread ... we’re just dangling...We’re entangled with each other.”²

God created the heavens and the earth, pieces that fit together, interconnected. Wolves, plants,

ants—and even though we may not want ants in our pants, or at a picnic, they do remind us to keep our planet living. That’s something two ants realized while watching a golfer

who had a little trouble connecting with the ball. And on one tee, he happened to put the ball next to an anthill. And when he took his first swing, he missed the ball and hit the anthill ... sent a few hundred of them [flying]. Then he took a second swing and, again, he missed and hit the anthill. As he wound up for a third try, one ant said to the other, “You know, it’s about time we got on the ball.”³

May the insight of those ants inspire us to get on the ball as well—to care for one another, to care for the other animals on this planet, and to care for our Earth, for it’s the only home we have.

¹ Dino Grandoni, September 19, 2022, www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2022/09/19/ants-population-20-quadrillion/

² Enrique Rivera, October 23, 2022, www.npr.org/2022/10/23/1130482740/william-shatner-jeff-bezos-space-travel-overview-effect

³ James F. Clarity and Warren Weaver Jr., “Briefing: Reagan’s ant joke,” *The New York Times*, May 7, 1985, www.nytimes.com, as quoted on HomileticsOnline.