

In the image

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Often when we talk about what makes us human, we talk about how we are different from other animals. We mention upright posture, language, culture, self-transcendence, and so on. Our concern seems to be articulating and establishing our distance from animals. Theologically speaking, what makes us human, what makes us distinct, is our responsibility for creation as bearers of God's image and not whatever way we might be different than other animals.

It is interesting that when God uses images and metaphors to describe God's own self, God and the biblical writers don't have any problem comparing God to various animals:

- Eagle
- Bear
- Lamb
- Hen

God is even compared to plants and rocks. Apparently it doesn't bother God to have some attributes in common with animals, plants, and rocks. God isn't threatened or diminished by naming common ground with the animal world.

God appears to be perfectly comfortable saying, I have some characteristics in common with bears, eagles, lambs, and even chickens. If God isn't afraid to embrace a connection with the animal world, why are we?

In the long process of evolution, sharing genetic material, abilities, and traits with the rest of the animal world simply doesn't diminish us. It connects us in deep and wonderful ways. That animals make tools, teach their young, make lifelong friendships, play, mourn, and reason is a wonderful witness to the amazing creativity of God.

We don't need to separate ourselves from the animal world. We can embrace our connection with other living creatures who are, like us, created and loved by God. We won't be diminished. Our exploration of the interconnections in the animal world can be a way to enter into the creative mystery of God. It can be a pathway into a deeper relationship with God and the world where God continues to create and care and love.

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