**Did Humans Really Evolve?**

Discussion Guide

**Synopsis**:  In this video, we learn about the human family tree and the evidence that we currently have for the evolution of our own species. We discuss a couple of possibilities for the origin of Adam and Eve’s bodies and reinforce the idea that no doctrine explains the mechanics of their creation. We will discuss this further here.

**Discussion Questions:**

Begin by showing the short video *Did Humans Really Evolve?* In this discussion guide we will talk about some of the things brought up in this video.

1. It is incorrect to say that human evolution means humans came from monkeys. Why is this an important concept to understand?

*Help your audience recall the idea that the process of evolution is branching. This means that each extant (meaning existing) species today shares common ancestry with other species; one species doesn’t turn into another. Thus, humans and chimpanzees share a common ancestor that was neither human nor chimp. One of the most common misconceptions about human evolution is that humans came from monkeys. This idea in many people’s minds belittles the human race and makes evolution seem highly unlikely. Helping your audience understand that this is not how evolution works, and that humans are just as unique from this ancestor as chimps are may make it easier for them to accept the idea that the human body could have evolved.*

1. Do we have evidence of pre-human ancestors and how do we know if this evidence is really a primitive hominin and not a primitive monkey?

*One of the big misconceptions amongst the general public surrounds the idea of how much evidence we have for primitive hominins. As the video said, we likely have more evidence of these creatures than just about any other Genus (group of organisms just above the species level) on Earth! We have found hundreds and thousands of fossilized remains and for most species (e.g., Homo Neanderthal or Homo erectus) we have hundreds of individuals. So, we are not simply extrapolating from the evidence we have for other animal evolution to humans. We have discovered and clearly documented many of these species. How do we know it is a primitive hominin? Ask your audience to recall some of the differences in skull features between humans and chimpanzees (e.g., brow ridge size, brain case size, canine size, elongation of the muzzle, etc.). We look for these characteristics in the primitive skulls we pull from the ground. To be categorized as a hominin, they have to be more similar to us than they are to chimpanzees. And they are. These creatures most certainly lived and died here on Earth. Where they fit in our family tree is still unknown, even to science, but we are discovering more and more each day. What we do know is that we are the only surviving species of Homo on Earth, and from a Gospel perspective, that is no accident.*

1. So, what makes us ‘human’? Do we have unique traits that no other species on Earth has ever shared?

*As the video pointed out, it is rather difficult to pinpoint an exact trait that uniquely sets our species apart from other hominins. However, encourage your audience to suggest traits that are uniquely human. Likely, many of these traits will be things for which it would be difficult to find evidence in the fossil record (for example, if your audience suggests that ‘being self-aware’ is uniquely human, it would certainly be difficult to find a bone, casting, tool, or behavior trace in the fossil record that would confirm whether they would recognize themselves in a mirror or not. However, we can look at other existing organisms to see if this trait exists in them. And it turns out that this particular one does.) For things that we can’t show by fossilized evidence, we just have to wonder and keep searching. It is important to emphasize, however, that we ARE unique in that we are children of God. That does most definitely make us unique.*

1. So, how does this all fit with Adam and Eve?

*The short answer is, we don’t know! No revelation has answered this question, and that is okay. For the time being, we know that primitive hominins existed, and we know that our bodies show a lot of evidence of having evolved (e.g., vestiges, atavisms, etc.). But we do not know how all of this fits into the Biblical account of Adam and Eve. God has chosen not to reveal this. At this point, you might choose to discuss some of the possibilities with your audience with the understanding that all of these are simply speculation, and that’s okay. The video offered two explanations that are compatible with the scientific evidence: 1) God used evolutionary means to create humans, including the bodies of Adam and Eve, or 2) God used evolutionary means to create hominins; however, Adam and Eve were a special creation case, placed in the Garden of Eden. There are many other possibilities and it is certainly fun (and okay) to think about them. We just need to keep in mind that the Lord has not chosen to reveal this truth to us at this point in time, so we are just encouraged to seek more knowledge, including the incredible findings coming from the scientific laboratory and field.*

1. (optional) How does accepting that our bodies likely evolved help improve our lives?

*Really the question here is ‘why does it matter so much?” Why should we have to even think about whether humans evolved or not? Does it even matter? Well, it turns out that it matters a great deal to those in the scientific and medical fields who are working to improve our lives. We often reap the benefits of those who did accept that our bodies are a product of evolution, even though we may not accept it.*

*[You might choose to share this one example: Preeclampsia is condition that can occur in pregnancy in which the mother’s blood pressure suddenly spikes to dangerous levels leading to premature birth and potentially infant death or disability. It can also cause stroke, kidney failure, or a ruptured liver in the mother. Preeclampsia kills 75,000 women worldwide each year and occurs in about 5% of pregnancies. Physicians have been aware of the condition for centuries but have struggled to figure out what is happening in the mother to cause her blood pressure to spike. An evolutionary biologist suggested that we think about this through an evolutionary lens. In brief, a mutation that causes the baby to solicit more nutrients from the mother (i.e., increasing blood flow and blood pressure) would benefit the father’s genes. However, mutations that allow the mother to control for this increased demand would also be favored. It becomes a problem if a father and mother do not have coordinated mutations. In essence, the evolutionary biologist suggested to physicians that instead of looking for what is happening in the mother’s body, they should be looking for a molecule being released by the fetus. Thankfully, the physician to whom he spoke, was willing to accept that our bodies are the result of evolution and would therefore be subject to this game of survival. He was willing to spend the money and time to investigate this. Lo and behold, he was correct! They are actively working on pharmaceutical treatments to prevent the signaling coming from the baby now. Thousands of lives will be saved.]*

*This benefit extends beyond human evolution. Because physicians know that microbes evolve, they are able to properly prescribe antibiotics to combat them. Because scientists know that viruses evolve, they are able to construct new vaccines each year to protect you. Because researchers know that humans share common ancestry with other mammals, they are able to test cancer treatments on other mammals before subjecting humans to testing. The list goes on and on. Understanding and accepting that evolution occurs allows us to use biology to its fullest extent for the benefit of humankind. As famous biologist Theodosius Dobzhansky famously said, “Nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evolution.” He was right.*