

Handout 2: Don't Worry; Be Happy!

by Holly Varnum

“Don't worry; be happy” should be everyone's mantra, right? I mean, isn't a positive outlook on life something admirable? Not necessarily. When we delve into this idea a little deeper, we see deception that's been permeating our society (and our churches!) for close to two decades now, and it's not even close to the truth of God's Word.

Moralistic Therapeutic What???

I recently read an article¹ explaining what was identified in the early 2000's as Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD) also known as, more *informally*—“believe-in-yourself-ism.” One of the repercussions of this new understanding is that I've become a victim of the *Baader-Meinhof phenomenon*—the experience where once something is brought to your attention, you see and notice it *everywhere* you go. Once you read the list of the tenets of MTD below, you'll know what I mean.

- Of course, I believe that God created the world. It's too complicated to just have materialized on its own.
- God wants me to be kind to others.
- God pretty much leaves me alone, but He's there if I need help.
- As long as you are a good person, you will go to heaven.
- God wants me to be happy and feel good about myself, right?

Then, I read another article where the author summed up the MTD philosophy quite well: “Everyone can conjure up some happiness and some niceness, so we sort of shelve God and decide we don't really need Him. We just need to believe in ourselves, to invent who we are and what we want to do, and we need to just go for it.”²

The more I looked into this philosophy, the more it reminded me of a scene from a Percy Jackson movie where Percy and his friends—looking for clues in their quest—end up at the Lotus Casino. When they enter the building, they are surrounded by music, dancing, lights, and laughter, and are immediately offered a lotus flower confection to eat. After eating just one, they begin to lose all sense of time and urgency, and completely get caught up in the enjoyment around them while continuing to consume more lotus flower treats. After days had passed virtually unnoticed, Percy heard his father's voice in his head whispering: “Don't eat the flower, Percy. It dulls the senses—keeps you prisoner here.”

The MTD philosophy feels good, but it dulls the senses and keeps you prisoner to a false premise. This type of thinking which “seems right to (people)” leads to death (Proverbs 14:12).

Eternity without God

I have actually heard people say they don't need or want God in their life, and they look forward to being in hell, partying it up with all their friends, etc., etc. What they are not understanding is that eternal death (hell) means complete separation from God *and* anything that shows the character of God. Let me be clear: *No one on Earth has ever experienced life without God.*

Galatians 5:22,23—known as the “fruit of the Spirit” verses to believers—include attributes of God Himself that He desires to see grow in believers, **not** to control us, but to give us the most fulfilling life possible. These qualities also make others want to be around us in order to enrich their own lives.

Using these qualities, allow me to elaborate about what life or death would be like completely devoid of God:

God is **LOVE**. *Without* Him there is **NO LOVE**, care, light, or warmth.

God is **JOY**. *Without* Him, joy, **HAPPINESS**, elation—whatever you want to call it—**IS NOT POSSIBLE**.

God is **PEACE**. *Without* Him, **LIFE IS CHAOS**, confusion, cacophony.

God is **PATIENCE**. *Without* Him, **TOLERANCE IS NON-EXISTENT**.

God is **GENTLENESS, GOODNESS, KINDNESS**. *Without* Him, **NOTHING** that is considered thoughtful, benevolent, **GOOD**, or selfless would exist.

God is **FAITHFUL(NESS)**. *Without* Him, fidelity, **LOYALTY**, brotherhood, and so on, are **OUT THE WINDOW**.

God is **SELF-CONTROL**. *Without* Him, the rule would be violence, chaos, lawlessness — **COMPLETE DISORDER**.

That is what hell is—a dark, chaotic, noise-filled (weeping, wailing, gnashing of teeth), panic-inducing environment with **NOTHING** good, kind, or comforting about it. There will be *no* friends, *no* pleasure, *no* parties, *no* rest.

MTD is a trap—an effective one at that—and the devil himself is at the root of it. Put another way, “Satan is most effective in the church when he comes not as an open enemy, but as a false friend; not when he persecutes the church, but when he joins it...”³

God’s Joy—Not the World’s “Happiness”

“You will show me the path of life. In your presence is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11). God created a perfect, glorious dwelling place beyond our imagination—**HEAVEN**—a place that includes *only* what is in line with His character. To keep it that way, His entrance requirement is simple ... sinless perfection. Wait a minute! That would mean **NO ONE QUALIFIES**, right? But remember, **God is love**. He loved you and me so much that He gave His Son, Jesus, to solve the sin problem that would separate us from Him forever. It’s His gift, but you have to believe it and receive it (John 3:16). If you don’t, *nothing* you can conjure up can change the reality of what will happen.

¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Moralistic-Therapeutic-Deism.html>

² Jen Oshman, “Why Moralistic Therapeutic Deism Is a Dead End,” *Crossway*, July 10, 2020. See <https://www.crossway.org/articles/why-moralistic-therapeutic-deism-is-a-dead-end/>

³ John MacArthur, *2 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2003), 371.