

“Doesn’t God Just Want Me to Be a Good Person & Happy?”

Mark 8:31-38

August 23, 2026

The Perspective

20’ 23’ 26’

Integrated Disciples — biblical worldview	6%	4%	4%
Emergent Followers — substantial biblical beliefs, but ultimately syncretistic	19%	14%	10%
World Citizens — worldview generally contrary to biblical teaching	75%	82%	85%

The Problem: Moral Therapeutic Deism

Moralistic – emphasizes the importance of right living from a religious point of view – being a good, happy, moral person

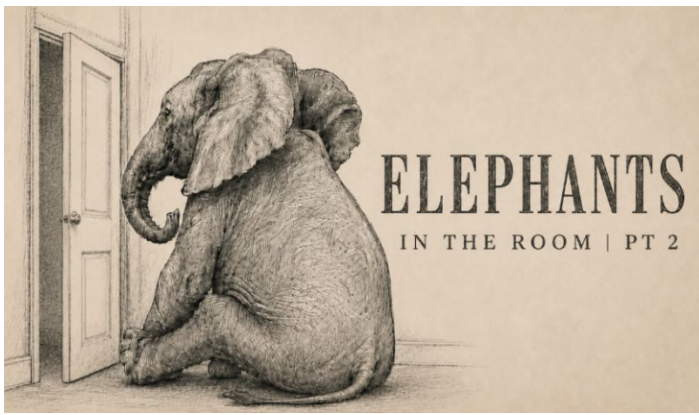
Therapeutic – this emphasizes the importance of feeling good about oneself, feeling happy, fulfilled, satisfied & at peace.

Deism – emphasizes a largely uninvolved God who keeps His distance & demands little or nothing but is always there to solve any & all problems.

- 1) A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth
- 2) God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions
- 3) The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself
- 4) God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when God is needed to resolve a problem
- 5) Good people go to heaven when they die.

The Prescription & Pathway

- 1) There is only ONE true & living God (who is 3 in 1) who is intimately & deeply involved in His creation. He is in control & in charge of all things. [Colossians 1:16-17](#); [Acts 17:25](#); [Isaiah 40:26](#); [Proverbs 19:21](#); [21:1](#)
- 2) The Lord demands we love Him first & foremost & then love our others (do what is good, nice & fair to others) because He first loved us. [Romans 1:32](#); [2:14-15 \(NLT\)](#); [Matthew 22:37-38](#); [1 John 4:7-11](#)
- 3) The goal of our lives is to deny ourselves, take up our cross, & follow Him. Jesus isn’t interested in our happiness, but our holiness, joy & transformation – to become more like Him! [Mark 8:34-38](#); [Matthew 5:3-12](#); [Psalm 16:11](#); [4:7](#); [Romans 12:1-2](#)
- 4) The Lord expects & desires to be deeply involved in every part of our lives. He doesn’t exist for us; we exist for Him. [Psalm 104:27-29](#); [Isaiah 43:6-7](#); [Jeremiah 29:11-13](#); [Romans 11:36](#); [1 John 5:14-15](#); [James 4:13-16](#); [4:3-4](#)
- 5) No one is good, all are sinners. Only those who repent of their sins, put their faith & trust in Jesus alone for salvation will go to heaven when they die – there are no exceptions. [Romans 3:12](#); [3:23](#); [John 14:6](#); [Acts 4:12](#); [Romans 6:23](#)



ELEPHANTS IN THE ROOM Pt 2

“Doesn’t God Just Want Me to Be a Good Person & Happy?”

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Quotes: Christian Smith

#1 "[MTD] believes that central to living a good and happy life is being a good, moral person. That means being nice, kind, pleasant, respectful, and responsible; working on self-improvement; taking care of one's health; and doing one's best to be successful."

"Being moral in this faith means being the kind of person who other people will like, fulfilling one's personal potential, and not being socially disruptive or interpersonally obnoxious."

#2 "This is not a religion of repentance from sin, of keeping the Sabbath, of living as a servant of a sovereign divine, of steadfastly saying one's prayers, of faithfully observing high holy days, of building character through suffering, of basking in God's love and grace, of spending oneself in gratitude and love for the cause of social justice, etc. Rather, what appears to be the actual dominant religion among U.S. teenagers is centrally about feeling good, happy, secure, at peace. It is about attaining subjective well-being, being able to resolve problems, and getting along amiably with other people."

#3 ["MTD"] is about belief in a particular kind of God: one who exists, created the world, and defines our general moral order, but not one who is particularly personally involved in one's affairs-especially affairs in which one would prefer not to have God involved. Most of the time, the God of this faith keeps a safe distance."

"This God is not demanding. He actually can't be, since his job is to solve our problems and make people feel good. In short, God is something like a combination Divine Butler and Cosmic Therapist - he is always on call, takes care of any problems that arise, professionally helps his people to feel better about themselves, and does not become too personally involved in the process."

ELEPHANTS IN THE ROOM Pt 2

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We complete our **Elephants in the Room Series Part 2**. Go ahead & turn to [Mark 8](#). Reminder website (petalfbc.com) or our YouTube Channel (Petal FBC) & access Part 1 & current series. This morning I want to talk about

Moral Therapeutic Deism

The term *Moralistic Therapeutic Deism* was first coined by sociologists Christian Smith and Melina Lundquist Denton in their 2005 book *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford University Press). Based on extensive research, they identified the predominant beliefs of American teenagers, even those that claim to be Christians. They named the core beliefs Moralistic Therapeutic Deism or MTD. The five core beliefs of MTD are as follows:

The Perspective

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is not an official religion. Probably no one would ever identify himself as a “Moralistic Therapeutic Deist.” The real problem is that [moralism](#) is not Christianity, and most people who hold these beliefs are likely to identify themselves as Christians when in fact they are living to glorify themselves!

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Therapeutic – this emphasizes the importance of feeling good about oneself, feeling happy, fulfilled, satisfied & at peace.

Deism – highlights a largely uninvolved God who keeps His distance demands little or nothing but always there to solve any & all problems.

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“Be nice + be happy + believe in God + call on Him when you need Him + good people go to heaven.”

The Prescription & Pathway

What Did Jesus Really Say?

✓ **Deny yourself, take up your cross daily and follow me**

This isn't a call to be miserable – to as some people say, we'll this is my cross and I'll just have to bear and be miserable – that's not what Jesus means at all. Remember the cross wasn't something somebody wore as a symbol of joy or thankfulness – it was a symbol of death. Remember, Peter wanted to forbid Jesus to die – didn't make him happy – yet it would be the very thing that which would save his life! Jesus never said “do what makes you happy.” In fact if he had lived his life with that mantra, things would have been very different for him and for the world – we would never have had eternal life! His call here is crystal clear and what leads us to be able to live a joy filled life that has happiness in it – deny yourself (the world says no way!), take up your cross (it's the same but also may look different for each of us) and follow me – (and there's no room for but's or if's or maybe's – it's all or nothing)

✓ **If you really want to live you have to learn how to die** [Galatians 2:20](#)

This is completely and totally backward from the way the world and the enemy tells us we need to live – but Jesus says, not if you want to be miserable come and die, but instead He says, come learn to die to who you were and are and then you will really begin to learn how to truly live and experience the joy I have for you!

What Does Jesus Say He Want for Us...

✓ **I'm more interested in your holiness than your happiness** [Romans 6:6-7; Galatians 5:24](#)

- ✓ I'm more interested in your obedience than your passing pleasures
1 John 2:17
- ✓ I'm more interested in your transformation than your temporary
delight James 1:2-4
- ✓ I'm more interested in My plan for you than your plan for you
Jeremiah 29:11
- ✓ I'm more interested in your soul than your circumstances John 12:25
- ✓ I'm more interested in your joy than your happiness John 15:11

It's the joy in following Jesus that never changes and isn't based on something that changes but someone who never changes. Jesus never said "do what makes you happy" because happiness was not his priority. There are things that are way more important than happiness. If all we pursue in this life is our own happiness, we will lose and actually we may well lose that happiness, but we will also lose much more. God doesn't call us to pursue happiness, he calls us to pursue Jesus. What our world needs these days is a bunch of people who are more concerned about pursuing joy in Jesus Christ and not the stuff of this world, and thus shining the light of Jesus in the darkness, in a world obsessed with the pursuit of happiness that will never satisfy them when what they need is the joy of Jesus that will satisfy now and forever.

What's missing from this teaching/way of living?

The beliefs of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism are "moralistic" in that they place a high value on "being good" as found in #2 and #5, above. *Good* is really defined by popular culture rather than the moral imperatives of the Bible. So tolerating behaviors the Bible calls sin might be seen as "good" while calling those behaviors "sin" might be seen as intolerant or hateful, which is bad.

The beliefs of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism are "therapeutic" in that the primary value is feeling good about oneself as articulated in beliefs #3 and #4, above. God's "job" is to take care of us.

The authors used the word *deism* because, in Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, God exists as the Creator, but He is relatively uninvolved (beliefs #1 and #4, above). [Deists](#) have objected to this use of the term because, in true deism, God never intervenes in human affairs. He created us, but He leaves us alone. For this reason, some have suggested that [theism](#) would be a better term. Theists believe that God exists and that He can and does intervene from time to time when needed, in answer to prayer, etc.

The most important point concerning Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, however, is not the difference between theism and deism, but how far removed from biblical truth some young people are. The beliefs of MTD are not isolated to Millennials, either. It seems that many people simply view God as a “cosmic genie,” a “divine bellhop,” or a roadside assistance mechanic—you don’t know Him or need to, but you can call Him when you are broken down and He will come and get you going again. The most important thing, according to MTD, is to be good, nice, and tolerant, and God will ultimately receive you into heaven. This view is probably held by a lot of Americans and seems to be becoming the dominant “civic religion,” which emphasizes the horizontal relationships with other people but minimizes a relationship with God. In short, MTD puts humanity at the center and, ultimately, each individual at the center of his or her own belief system.

Biblical Christians will have problems with all 5 key points of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism:

1. Not just “a god” exists, but the God of the Bible, who has revealed himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Whoever does not honor Jesus Christ as God does not honor God (see [John 5:23](#)).
2. God does not just want people to be “nice” but commands that they obey Him. He is the One who defines *good* and *nice*. He calls sin “sin” and promises to judge it (see [Romans 1:18–32](#)).

3. The central goal of life is to give glory to God. A by-product may be that we feel good about ourselves, but that is not the goal (see [Romans 11:36](#)).

4. Our primary goal as believers is to be constantly in tune with God, following His leading and in daily fellowship with Him – daily walk/relationship with Him. We are to “pray without ceasing” ([1 Thessalonians 5:17](#)).

5. No one is good enough to go to heaven. All have sinned and fall short of God’s glory ([Romans 3:23](#)); no one is good enough, and that is why we need Jesus, God in the flesh. He lived the perfect life that we could not, and He died to pay for our sin so that we might be made acceptable to God. “He himself bore our sins’ in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; ‘by his wounds you have been healed’” ([1 Peter 2:24](#)).

Happiness defined (dictionary)... delighted, pleased, or glad over a particular thing; enjoying, characterized or indicative of pleasure, state of well-being, & contentment

Happiness is usually defined for most people by... my job/career, my family- my spouse or my kids or my grandkids, my hobbies, a vacation, my success, my emotions – feeling good about something excitement, thrills, my stuff – house, cars, toys, etc., my circumstances, personal achievement, and on and on the list can go.

I asked Chat GPT how it would define happiness and it was pretty good... Happiness is a deeply personal and subjective experience, but at its core, it often means a sense of contentment, fulfillment, and well-being. It’s not just about feeling joy or pleasure in the moment, but also about having a sense of purpose, connection, and inner peace. Happiness can come from different sources for different people—relationships, achievements, personal growth, creativity, or even simple moments of gratitude. Some see happiness as a fleeting emotion, while others view it as a state of mind or a way of life.

But that philosophy raises some big questions:

- What if what makes me happy makes someone else miserable?

- Is it happiness in the moment or longer lasting happiness that I should shoot for?
- What if what was making me happy disappears or leaves or is no longer available?
- What if what might make me happy for a while actually means I lose the essence of who I am and maybe even my soul?

The problem with the pursuit of happiness....

- **It's circumstantial** – based on what may or may not be happening in the moment or how things in my world are going or how people around me are living and what they are doing or what's happening in my job or my home or my circumstances in my life, etc. It can be fleeting and an elusive chase and one that can never be satisfied.
- **It's colored** (meaning what I view as making me happy may not make someone else happy or my happiness may be at the expense of someone else's happiness like I win a game and someone else has to lose or I get the promotion and someone else doesn't or I think this is a good thing but someone else doesn't etc.)
- **It's confusing** – what makes us happy today may not make us happy tomorrow or make those around us happy or do I shoot for happiness just for today or am I shooting what will make me happy later.
- **It's hard to count** – meaning happiness many times can be hard to

measure or quantify it and only be when things are going my way or what I wanted or planned and dreamed of, etc. I'm the measuring stick or the world is – ILLUS: Solomon tried everything the world said counted for being happy and in the end he found it was all in vain, he didn't find happiness but in fact found the exact opposite, he says it's worthless!

What Jesus NEVER Said...

- Do whatever makes you happy – you do you
- I want you to be happy, you deserve to be happy
- Do whatever it takes to make you happy- YOLO (you only live once – time's running out, you're not getting any younger) (I've heard this one the most, Jesus wants you to be happy so go ahead and do that even though it contradicts God's Word or you hurt someone, or you compromise your faith)
- You'll find happiness in this world – it will give you what you need

- Don't worry be happy
- Go into all the world and preach whatever makes people happy
- Whoever wants to be my disciple and be happy, must affirm themselves, avoid the cross, and follow their own heart
- Ask & it will be given to you, because God is your Celestial Sugar Daddy.
- Doesn't matter what you do just you do you Boo!
- I don't want you to be happy – I want you to miserable and follow me

Now this leads to an important question: **Anything wrong with being happy?** No not at all. The Lord designed & created us to be able to experience happiness to be happy However, it can't be the sole pursuit of your life because the truth is happiness can and is often fleeting because it's based on something that usually doesn't last or isn't stable or it changes. Our world tells us to pursue happiness, that's the goal – I want my children to live a successful and happy life – I want them to be happy we think and if we're not careful we'll do whatever it takes to do that but in the end sadly we may help them be happy but they'll end up losing their soul in the end! And the question truly is, what do we want for our children – success and happiness or joy found in following Jesus Christ and giving up your life and learning how to die to yourself so you can really then learn to live!

Have you come to the place today where see & understand that without Christ you have no hope or life and today you want to surrender your life to Jesus? Share the ABC's! Identify with Jesus Be baptized! Identify with His Body Are you a member of a Church? Without one a Christian is an orphan. Don't just attend step over the line today & join this family! **Invest in your calling** – to answer God's call to full time ministry **Identify where is the Lord speaking to me from the message today**
PRAY Invitation: “Goodness of God”

