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Gary B. Swanson

On Columbus Day 1992, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) began a 10-year search for extraterrestrial intelligence (SETI). So far, apparently, there has been no answer. We're still on hold!

Since 1960, NASA has made 50 such attempts, but previous radio searches had sampled only a thin slice of the cosmos. The SETI project, however, linked existing radio telescopes around the world with newly developed computer programs that were capable of scanning 15 million frequency channels a second. That was 10,000 times more frequencies than the previous 50 attempts combined—and at 300 times the sensitivity.

Soon after scientists initiated such an extensive a program, they began to worry about what they should do if they succeeded. What should we do if someone out there actually receives our signal and sends back an answer? What do we say next? How do we communicate with a species

PEOPLE FROWN SOMETIMES

from another planet? In the event that we ever do hear back from outer space, some have suggested that we should take a cue from how we are presently communicating with other species from *this* planet. With this in mind, interspecies communication psychologist Francine Patterson, who taught Koko, an adult lowland gorilla, how to communicate with American Sign Language, asked Koko, “What would you say to someone who didn’t know anything about gorillas or people?”

After little hesitation, Koko, who has the vocabulary of a six- or seven-year-old deaf child, signed back, “Koko good” and “People frown sometimes.”

In charitable honesty, Koko has put her finger on something important. The fact is that members of the *Homo sapiens* species are not perfect, and apparently it doesn’t take a team of psychologists to recognize this. A gorilla can see that we have some problems. By and large, we’re un-

happy. We frown.

And that is a shame. We are an unhappy species. Should we tell the rest of the universe that we allow others of our very own kind to starve to death every day? That we focus an inordinate amount of our intelligence and resources on the development of weapons that could literally wipe out our entire species and many more besides? That we think so little of ourselves that we surgically discard thousands of our own unborn young?

Some scientists, considering the possibility of communicating with extraterrestrial life forms, are genuinely worried that if we tell creatures on other worlds what we're truly like, they are very likely to have the intelligence, technology, and compassion to put us out of our misery. The writers of science fiction have actually explored this distressing scenario many times. Even C. S. Lewis, in his space trilogy, betrayed grave concern about the possibility of human space travel. With his Christian worldview of the depravity of humankind, he could see no point in sharing this kind of information with whoever or whatever is "out there."

But now, of course, we find ourselves in a potentially nonfictional situation. Real scientists are using real instrumentation to communicate a real message.

Certainly sin has made this Earth

a less than ideal place to live. And unfortunately, humanity is looking for solutions to our problems everywhere but in the right place. More than two centuries ago, Thomas Jefferson wrote in the United States Declaration of Independence that all are entitled to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." But what is happiness, and how can we achieve it?

To work out a definition of happiness, it may be necessary first to explain what happiness isn't.

It isn't the same as fun. "Fun is what we experience during an act," writes Dennis Prager. "Happiness is what we experience after an act. . . . Understanding and accepting that true happiness has nothing to do with fun is one of the most liberating realizations we can ever come to."¹

Furthermore, it isn't synonymous with success. There are simply too many successful people among us who are terribly unhappy. We cannot observe their dissatisfaction without concluding that success seldom fulfills humankind's pursuit of happiness.

And it isn't avoiding what makes you miserable. If this were true, then truly money could buy happiness. The more money you have, the more you could distance yourself from what makes you miserable. But the existence of so many wealthy yet unhappy people on this Earth sug-

gests that money can't make unhappiness go away.

The fact is, "we are happiest," writes Frederick Turner, "when we are striving not for happiness but, say, for artistic perfection, or for the purest service to other persons, or for knowledge."²

This is what Jesus meant when, after washing the disciples' feet and pointing them to a life of service to others, He said, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John 13:17, KJV). And the Bible actually offers several very practical conditions for happiness:

1. *Trust in God.* "Those who trust the Lord," wrote Solomon, "will be happy" (Prov. 16:20, NLT). This from a man who learned the hard way that success and wealth weren't the answer. The world's happiest people are those who realize their own human weakness and are able to put their wholehearted trust in God's infinitely loving care.

2. *Wisdom of God.* Solomon at last freely acknowledged from whom his wisdom came and he exclaimed, "Happy is the man who finds wisdom" (3:13, NKJV). The real danger here—and it leads to unhappiness—is to forget the true source of human intelligence and

intellectual accomplishment.

3. *Hope in God.* When the disciples learned that Jesus had been resurrected, they realized for the first time that He had provided a way of escape from the world's misery and unhappiness. After He'd risen from the grave, Jesus appeared to His disciples and "showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord" (John 20:20, NIV).

We have an assurance that God loved us enough to send His Son to this Earth to set things right—so we never need to frown again. "Grace to you," the apostle Paul wrote, "and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father" (Gal. 1:3, 4, NKJV). This is a message that we can communicate with confidence to the rest of the cosmos—as if the other universal inhabitants out there didn't already know!

REFERENCES

¹ "The Secret of True Happiness," *Reader's Digest* (June 1989), pp. 177, 178.

² "Life on Mars: Cultivating a Planet—and Ourselves," *Harper's Magazine* (August 1989), p. 34.

