

*In all my prayers for
all of you, I always pray
with joy.*

—PAUL, PHILIPPIANS 1:4, NIV

Several weeks ago, I saw a picture in a magazine that caught my eye, which is, I suppose, exactly what magazine publishers want pictures to do. It was a picture of 27 large radio telescopes with a caption that read: "Ears to the Sky." These sophisticated machines were extensions of the human ear. A growing number of scientists now believe there is intelligent

Ears to the Sky

by
Angel
Manuel
Rodríguez

extraterrestrial life in the universe. Messages have been sent, and a reply is eagerly being awaited. But, aside from the humming routine noise of the universe, no clear answer has yet been received.

These scientists appear to be unaware that for thousands of years many humans have been sending messages to the very center of the universe, to the One who rules the cosmos, and what's more, they have received answers. These are the individuals who know the joy of praying.

Joy is difficult to define; it seems to be the integral response of humans to the

thrilling experience of finding meaning in life. In the Bible, joy is associated with God because His presence enriches human life, imbues it with meaning. The result is joy. Joy in prayer means that when we pray, we find meaning for our lives because we fellowship with the Source of true joy.

According to Jesus, prayer generates joy when it is answered (John 16:24). Our joy is complete, perfect, when we receive what we requested. Joy possesses us and we tell others about this wonderful experience: "God infused meaning into a situation devoid of meaning and filled my life with joy."

Millions of Christians know the joy of answered prayers. They aimed their heart's petitions to the heavens, and God captured their distress signal. Isn't it amazing that the King of the universe can receive a signal from a sinner and in love answer us!

But what if the Lord does not answer your prayer immediately? we may wonder. What if He never grants you exactly what you asked for? Can you still find joy in prayer? This is perhaps the most disturbing aspect of prayer. It may well be the reason why so many Christians pray so little. At times, prayer seems ineffective.

There is indeed an element of uncertainty in prayer. We can never be absolutely certain that God will grant us what we requested. Jesus called our attention to this elusive aspect of prayer when in the Lord's Prayer He included the phrase, "Your will be done" (Matthew 6:10, NIV). Jesus knew that there can be, in prayer, a conflict of wills. But he made clear that God's commitment to answer prayers does not entail the loss of God's freedom or of His loving will. In His freedom, God will grant us what we really need even though we do not always know what it is (Romans 8:26).

Since Jesus placed the uncertainty in God's will, the uncertainty itself is meaningful. It was nested in God's love and concern for His creatures. Therefore we can find joy in prayer in the midst of uncertainty, while waiting for an answer.

Human life without prayer is characterized by sadness, anxiety, and the absence of true joy. Those who find in God a friend on whom they can place their

burdens leave His presence with peace and joy. Of course, this is not perfect joy. We experience perfect joy when our prayer is answered. But while we wait for the answer we can still experience joy. This is a somewhat fragile joy but is to be preserved through constant prayer (Philippians 4:4-6). We can take our anxiety to God in prayer and experience joy (1 Samuel 1:1-18).

There is also joy in prayer when we pray for others. Intercessory prayer is part of the Christian life (Philippians 1:4, 5). This type of prayer generates joy because through it we assist others in their fight against evil forces. The church is involved in a great controversy (Ephesians 6:12), and we can defeat the enemy through intercessory prayer. It may well be that one of the most important challenges we face is motivating ourselves and others to every day offer intercessory prayers for the world church.

When we pray for others we make a difference in the cosmic conflict. Intercessory prayer rejects the apparent permanency of the world. By such prayer we say that we firmly believe that change is possible and through prayer we can assist others in their conflicts. Paul wrote, "Join me in my struggle by praying to God for me" (Romans 15:30, NIV). This is almost unbelievable! We can strengthen each other spiritually through intercessory prayer.

It is certainly a sobering thought to believe that God, in His freedom, has allowed us to move His omnipotent arm (see Daniel 9:23). Because of that we can find joy in intercessory prayer. Through it we work together with God to assist others in the cosmic conflict.

Yes, there is joy in prayer. Let us experience it more often! □

Angel Manuel Rodríguez (Th.D., Andrews University), born in Puerto Rico, is associate director of the Biblical Research Institute in Silver Spring, Maryland. Previously he served as president of Antillean Adventist University and as academic vice-president of Southwestern Adventist College.

Science and the Universe

Imagine a family of mice who lived all their lives in a large piano. To them in their piano world came the music of the instrument, filling all the dark spaces with sound and harmony. At first the mice were impressed by it. They drew comfort and wonder from the thought there was Someone who made the music—though invisible to them—above, yet close to them. They loved to think of the Great Player whom they could not see.

Then one day a daring mouse climbed up part of the piano and returned very thoughtful. He had found out how the music was made. Wires were the secret—tightly stretched wires of graduated lengths which trembled and vibrated. They must revise all their old beliefs; none but the most conservative could any longer believe in the Unseen Player.

Later another explorer carried the explanation further. Hammers were now the secret, numbers of hammers dancing and leaping on the wires. This was a more complicated theory, but it all went to show that they lived in a purely mechanical and mathematical world. The Unseen Player came to be thought of as a myth.

But the Pianist continued to play.

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