

JENNIFER
ROTHSCHILD

HEAVEN FOR TODAY

60 DEVOTIONS ON HOW
THE LIFE TO COME CHANGES
YOUR LIFE RIGHT NOW

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To my dad, who stepped into “The Gain” on
February 18, 2018. Your presence here made
my life so much richer, and your presence
there makes heaven even sweeter.

I can’t wait to be with you again
with the One our souls love.

Dad, earth is short. Heaven is long.

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*“May your Kingdom come
soon. May your will be done
on earth, as it is in heaven.”*

Matthew 6:10 NLT

Contents

Introduction	1
<i>Day 1:</i> Death Is Like a Birth	3
<i>Day 2:</i> When You Smell the Flowers	7
<i>Day 3:</i> Further Up and Further In	11
<i>Day 4:</i> Ever-Laughing Life	15
<i>Day 5:</i> There Is a River	19
<i>Day 6:</i> A Forever Hello	23
<i>Day 7:</i> The First Face I See	27
<i>Day 8:</i> Already and Not Yet	31
<i>Day 9:</i> The Tree Stands Forever	35
<i>Day 10:</i> Because He's from There	39
<i>Day 11:</i> Good and Hard	43
<i>Day 12:</i> Heaven Is Best	47
<i>Day 13:</i> Heaven Is the Gain	51
<i>Day 14:</i> Their Eyes Were Watching God	55
<i>Day 15:</i> A Reunion, Not an Introduction	59
<i>Day 16:</i> Not Hidden in the Heavens	63
<i>Day 17:</i> Turf and Twig	67
<i>Day 18:</i> Angels Watching You	71
<i>Day 19:</i> Certain Knowledge, Not Perfect Knowledge	75
<i>Day 20:</i> Longing to Kneel	79
<i>Day 21:</i> Dwell on the Place You Will Dwell	83
<i>Day 22:</i> How to See the World	87
<i>Day 23:</i> Death Is the Comma	91
<i>Day 24:</i> Living in Lenten Lands	95

<i>Day 25: “Don’t Make Me Come Back”</i>	99
<i>Day 26: Caught Between the Beauty</i>	103
<i>Day 27: Cement to Heaven, Sticky Note to Earth</i>	107
<i>Day 28: Death, Where Is Your Sting?</i>	111
<i>Day 29: With Them in Worship</i>	115
<i>Day 30: Earth Is Short</i>	119
<i>Day 31: Facing East</i>	123
<i>Day 32: Heaven Is Near When Jesus Is Near</i>	127
<i>Day 33: Born in Heaven</i>	131
<i>Day 34: More Than You Expect</i>	135
<i>Day 35: Only Two Kinds of People</i>	139
<i>Day 36: What Book Is on God’s Coffee Table?</i>	143
<i>Day 37: Don’t Miss the Point</i>	147
<i>Day 38: An Endless Summer</i>	151
<i>Day 39: Feeling the Hand of God</i>	155
<i>Day 40: How Big Is Heaven?</i>	159
<i>Day 41: Rejoicing in Heaven</i>	163
<i>Day 42: A Mary Grace Moment</i>	167
<i>Day 43: His Mercy Follows You Home</i>	171
<i>Day 44: Imperfect Revelation</i>	175
<i>Day 45: One Day You Will Hear “Well Done”</i>	179
<i>Day 46: Set Your Heart on Pilgrimage</i>	183
<i>Day 47: Live Homesick</i>	187
<i>Day 48: You Won’t Miss the Mountain</i>	191
<i>Day 49: Die Before You Die</i>	195
<i>Day 50: Eden Had No Tombstones</i>	199
<i>Day 51: Living Your Last Words</i>	203
<i>Day 52: Not Enough Time</i>	207
<i>Day 53: One More Dash</i>	211
<i>Day 54: Heaven Rules</i>	215
<i>Day 55: The Ground May Forget</i>	219
<i>Day 56: The Right Covering</i>	223
<i>Day 57: A Better Word</i>	227
<i>Day 58: The Strongest and Highest in Heaven</i>	231
<i>Day 59: Our Glorious Unending</i>	235
<i>Day 60: She Walks by Sight</i>	239
Notes	242

Introduction

Less than one second after you die, you will find out what waits for you in heaven.

But what about the two and a half billion seconds you will likely live here on earth? Chances are, if you live to be eighty years old, you will have accumulated more than two billion seconds.

So what if the reality of that day when you live your first second in heaven could change all the hundreds of days and millions of seconds you have left here on earth?

It can.

Heaven isn't just for tomorrow, my friend. It can change your life today.

That's why I've created sixty invitations for you to engage heaven now—as you sip your coffee, before you nod off to sleep, while you sit beneath an oak tree, or when you hold a sleeping baby. Each of these devotionals are little slices of eternity, time for you to consider heaven, contemplate its reality, and be comforted by it right now, in your real life.

As you read through these reflections, don't be surprised if I mention death from time to time because, well, we can't step into the next life without leaving this one first. But you will discover that as far as the Lord is concerned, death is not the period at the end of our stories; it is the comma that transitions us into our glorious “unending”—the forever stories of our lives.

As you turn each page, you'll see how heaven's beauty shimmers through all creation, causing those who behold it to ache with eternal longing. You'll taste how heaven's bounty nourishes your spirit with the finest of fare and quenches your deepest thirst with the purest of Living Water. You'll hear the gentle whisper of heaven to your heart—that God will wipe away every tear, and someday, there will be no more pain or death. You'll feel heaven's

comfort as it assures every broken heart that weeping may endure for the night but joy, unending joy, comes in the morning.

Listen carefully, for if you do, you'll hear heaven's grace echo into your soul that God is not willing that any should perish—that it's available with gates open wide to whosoever will believe. If that is you, come!

My dear fellow sojourner, open your eyes to the place of heaven. Open your faith to the promise of heaven. Open your heart to the person of heaven—Jesus. He is our hope in this life and forever.

Oh friend, Jesus didn't die just to bring you to heaven someday; He died to bring heaven to you on this day.

So let's live every second we've got left in light of heaven.

Love,
Jennifer

DAY 1

Death Is Like a Birth

*Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell
in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a
dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.*

ISAIAH 26:19 ESV

Heaven. It is our glorious unending, when our faith becomes sight. It is our true country, our Father's House (Phil. 3:20; John 14:2). And it is the place of no more tears, sorrow, crying, or pain (Rev. 21:4).

The big problem with heaven, though, is that we have to die to get there. And can we be honest? We may be made for eternity, but most of us really appreciate longevity. We fear death because it is often shrouded in the unknown.

We don't know what it feels like to die. We don't know what it is like to close our eyes to this earth and open them in heaven. Perhaps we can use our imagination and compare it to something we do understand: a birth.

Imagine a little baby nestled in her mother's womb. She grows there, safe and sheltered. That warm cocoon is her whole world.

Yet her world is so very tiny and dark. Like a fish in an aquarium doesn't know water is wet and has no idea he's surrounded by invisible walls, that tiny baby doesn't know she is confined, crowded, with no air, no light.

Her mother marvels at how every kick and elbow is met with boundaries. Each poke and nudge, another reminder that the baby's tiny world can hardly

contain her. *Oh, the mother thinks, how this child must be ready and longing to come out into this world where it is bright and boundless.*

But the baby? She is content. She simply can't conceive that *her* world is not *the* world. She doesn't know the dark is dark until it is her time to travel through the birth canal and be born into the world she was created to live in—the world of light, air, and boundlessness.

Could that be what it feels like to die?

Here on this side of eternity, we think this world is it. We think we know shelter, freedom, and light. But in reality, we only see the shadows and hear the whispers of another world just beyond us. We only fear dying to this current world because we really don't know what it feels like to be fully alive in the future world of radiance, splendor, and endless joy.

There will be a day when each of us travels through that “birth canal” and awakens to the true light, to boundless freedom and love, to live in the world we were created for and be with the One who created us for Himself.

Do you think of death this way? As a birth? Or do you shy away from talking or thinking about death due to fear and dread? I suppose it is only right to feel negative emotions toward what the Bible considers a great “enemy” of life (1 Cor. 15:26). Death indeed feels shattering, emptying, and totally counterintuitive—and, well, it should, for Eden had no tombstones.

But there is a difference in mourning death and fearing it. For death is defeated. Try as it may to make its blow a fatal one, it cannot. Because of Christ, death may take a swing at us, and we may fall into the burial ground from the impact, but sure as the sun rises, we get back up. We rise in resurrection from the ashes, like a hidden seedling sprouting out of the soil. Life pushes us out to the other side.

Poet George Herbert wrote on this very idea when he said, “Death used to be an executioner, but the gospel makes him just a gardener.”¹ Tim Keller expanded that thought: “Death used to be able to crush us, but now all death can do is plant us in God’s soil so we become something extraordinary.”²

So it is with birth. Delivering a baby comes with anguish and sorrow as the mother feels the pain and the baby even cries as it loses a prior world. But, just as Jesus teaches, all that momentary sorrow and fear gives way as something extraordinary unfurls:

“You will weep and mourn. . . . You will become sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy. When a woman is in labor, she has pain because her time has come. But when she has given birth to a child, she no longer remembers the suffering because of the joy that a person has been born into the world. So you also have sorrow now. But I will see you again. Your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy from you.” (John 16:20–22)

Oh, my friend, death isn't the period at the end of our stories. Death is the comma that transitions us from the prologue to the forever stories of our lives, allowing us to step fully into our glorious unending where we finally trade faith for sight. It is the birthing passage that propels us into the everlasting arms of the One who saved us and sealed us for eternity with Himself.

May we forever praise the God of heaven—the One who can take a death sentence and turn it into a birth.

*LORD, may Your truth inform how I feel about death.
Thank You for turning death on its head and making
it a birth! I praise You for walking me through this
life and into the next one, the forever one, with You.
I trust You with all I don't understand. AMEN.*

DAY 2

When You Smell the Flowers

For we walk by faith, not by sight.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:7

It was a sultry South Florida afternoon. The sun hung heavy and the humidity thick when Mike, my mobility instructor, finished up my first lesson of learning to walk in the dark. I was seventeen years old and I had only been blind for about a year when I got my first white cane, and with it I got Mike, the amazing guy who taught me how to use it.

On that first lesson, he showed me how to navigate safely and helped me gain some independence. He walked me around my neighborhood, pointing out how to hold the cane, how to tap it, and how to anticipate all the rough places I would encounter.

Sweaty from the Miami heat, and probably from the stress I felt, we turned the last corner toward my home. He paused and asked, “Do you smell it?”

I stopped, breathed in my surroundings. I did smell it. A lush bush of blooming hibiscus was right there on the corner near my home.

“When you smell the flowers,” Mike said, “you know you’re almost home.” So, my friend, I ask you what Mike asked me: “Do you smell it?”

Pause and breathe in your surroundings.

Do you smell the fragrance of heaven wafting along the path you walk? It is your reminder that home, your Father’s House in heaven, is not far away.

What fragrance?, you might be wondering.

When you consider all the Bible mentions about the lush environment of heaven, you can't help but conclude it's a feast of the senses—which includes smells! Look at all this imagery that describes our eternal home:

- It's a place that will “burst into bloom” with an “abundance of flowers” (Isa. 35:2 NIV and NLT).
- It has a certain kind of incense hanging in the air—one that is filled with prayers from believers all over the world (Rev. 5:8; 8:3–4).
- It contains the Tree of Life that bears abundant, lush fruit (Rev. 22:2).
- It's an environment where “water will gush in the wilderness, and streams in the desert” (Isa. 35:6) and the “river of the water of life, clear as crystal” flows straight from God's throne (Rev. 22:1).
- It carries the alluring aromas of a grand banquet filled with choice meats, refined drinks, the best foods, and more (Isa. 25:6; Rev. 19:9; see also Luke 13:29; 22:30).

Whether metaphorical or literal, each of these rich reminders helps us stop and breathe in the reality, richness, satisfaction, and assurance of our ultimate home: heaven. And remembering these aromas of our eternal future awakens wonder and stirs our hope even now.

So when you smell literal flowers on an ordinary day here on earth, remember heaven, where buds will burst into bloom beyond your wildest imagination, petals and colors as far as the eye can see.

When the wafting aroma of a candle, essential oils, or a special blend of incense fills your house during a holiday, remember heaven, where prayers are an even sweeter fragrance.

When the scent of a freshly cut peach or mango or banana or watermelon fills your nose, remember heaven and the endless fruit produced by the truest and greatest Tree.

When you walk past a water well, or hike alongside a rushing stream, or breathe in the pure and refreshing intensity of a waterfall, remember heaven, where a crystal-clear river flows for all to drink and be satisfied.

When you attend a dinner party and immediately smell the savory scents of the kitchen, remember heaven, where the better feast awaits.

With each fragrance in this life, remember the next one, for it is just around the corner. The scent of eternity is drawing you even now to the beauty, the hope, and assurance of your ultimate home.

You will navigate bright and dark days here. Some days are filled with flowers and feasts, but many are not. Even still, pause, and find a way to breathe in the fragrance of heaven, no matter how the day ends up. On the hard, dark days, don't forget: The shadows you may face and feel here—sickness, stress, sorrow—are real, but choosing to stop and inhale the aromas of eternity gives you the power to remember that heaven is even more real. And it is not so far away.

As I like to say to honor Mike: On this side of eternity we walk by scent, not by sight. And each time you breathe one in, you will know you are almost home.

LORD, tune my heart to eternity. Awaken my spiritual senses to perceive the hope of heaven even now. Help me to notice when You give me “scents” of my forever home. Help me to slow down and breathe in the hope of heaven now, inhaling the sweet aroma of eternity, and walk with You by “scent” on this day, anticipating the day my scent will be sight. AMEN.

DAY 3

Further Up and Further In

Then the one seated on the throne said, “Look, I am making everything new.” He also said, “Write, because these words are faithful and true.”

REVELATION 21:5

I begin most writing days by rubbing the head of the squatty little C. S. Lewis bust that sits on my desk. I run my fingers across the craggy brow and pat his balding crown with affection. I greet Jack with a grin and say, “Further up and further in!” I know it’s a goofy ritual, but it helps awaken my imagination and shift my mentality into writing mode.

To paraphrase what Lewis writes, “Come further up and further in” is the call of Jewel, the unicorn in C. S. Lewis’s final book of the Narnia series, *The Last Battle*.³

It’s an encouragement to the characters to keep exploring Aslan’s country. The cast of characters all shout it to each other as they venture forward. They move onward and upward. They discover every step takes them into a more wonderful and real version of the world they knew.

As they advance, their eyes see a sky that is the most brilliant clear blue. The sunlight bathes the landscape with a golden warm glow. The grass beneath their feet is greener and more lush than any they had ever seen, almost vibrating with life. Majestic mountains rise in the distance, their peaks canopied by a sparkling mist. They breathe in the freshest, most fragrant air

as they listen to the sound of rushing water from crystal-clear streams. They are filled with wonder as they move forward with amazement and excitement.

The whole scene is teeming with overwhelming wonder and joy as they heed the call to go further up and further in.

Lewis created a powerful image of the New Narnia. It's a land more real and beautiful than the one before. As the characters move further up and further in, they realize that every good thing they'd ever known was just a shadow of the greater reality that was unfolding before them.

We have a greater reality, too, that will unfold before us. It is a world more "real" than the one we know now.

We too have a true Narnia, our forever home of heaven.

It is the place where every joy is amplified, every beauty is magnified, and every longing is fulfilled.

Just as the children in Narnia discover that Aslan's country is more solid and vibrant than anything they've ever known, we can anticipate that heaven will be the ultimate fulfillment of every promise and hope ever held. Every shadow here will be substance there (Col. 2:17). Every hope here will be reality there.

On this side of eternity, we face shadows and stress—the difficulties and fallenness of this life. At the same time, we also experience daylight and delight—sweet evidences of God's Word and God's benevolence still holding this world together. On the other side of eternity, heaven promises a place where both these things, good and bad, are made new.

Look at God's own words in Revelation 21:5: "Look, I am making everything new." Not some things. *Everything*. Other translations say, "all things." Not just the bad things or the good things, but *all things*. And not just the bad things turned to good, but the good things turned to awe-inspiring. God will take it *all* and make it new. Make it better. Make it unbelievably sublime. Make it the *real* version of what we were hoping for all along.

Here is a taste of what I mean. If you enjoy the natural world now—which is a world that is beautiful, yes, but still operates under a curse—just wait till you see the real thing in the forever heaven of the new heavens and new earth! If you enjoy the earthly version of worship now, just wait till you see what it was patterned after in the heavens (Heb. 8:5; 10:1). If you appreciate the way God once ordained certain practices around food, drink, festivals, and rest, it's a whole other level of "real" when you experience eternal life with the One those "shadows" were actually pointing to (Col. 2:17)!

Just as it was for Jewel in Narnia, a day is coming when all that came before will be remembered as mere copies and shadows of the real thing. As once we cross the threshold of our true Narnia, heaven, we will want to go further up and further in to explore just how much better the original pattern is, no matter what specific item we happen to be looking at. As Lewis writes, “The things that seem most real to us now are only a glimpse of the greater reality to come.”⁴

So, let this scene from a children’s book awaken a vision that fills you with hope and anticipation for that glorious day.

What is good for you today? What is bad? No matter what form it takes, my friend, it’s just a shadow. And when you see the real thing, the *new* thing, you’ll realize it’s a lot like the renewed Narnia: a land more real and beautiful than the one before.

LORD, thank You for being my true Aslan, my Lion of Judah, my Savior and God. Thank You for drawing my heart to my Forever Home, my True Narnia where I will dwell with You and You will make all things new. Encourage my heart today, if I hit a stumble or misstep, to keep moving further up and further in. AMEN.

DAY 4

Ever-Laughing Life

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him [will] . . . have everlasting life.”

J O H N 3 : 1 6 N K J V

If we are already friends, or if you're familiar with my work, you know I am (among many things) a Bible teacher and speaker. Years ago I spoke at a church in Knoxville, Tennessee, where I was introduced to a charming little girl named Bailey who was only eight years old. I instantly felt a kinship with her because as you may know, in my own story over the years, I became blind by way of disease—and this little girl was also blind. She may have been born blind, but she had no idea boundaries exist!

When I first met her, she fluttered about me like a butterfly with fresh new wings. She giggled and chattered with the most expressive lilt to her sweet voice! When I discovered she loved to sing, I invited her to join me on stage. She held the microphone like a pro and totally upstaged me! She began her song with an unexpected announcement to the audience . . .

“I love Alan Jackson!”

The audience roared with laughter and I panicked just a little inside. What had I done? This little thing was made for the stage! I gently reminded her to sing about Jesus instead of speak about Alan Jackson. She began her song. And what followed brought tears to my eyes and to the eyes of the hundreds of women gathered there with me that night. It was spectacular.

After the applause died down, I asked Bailey if she knew any Bible verses she would like to share with the crowd. She began with the words of John 3:16.

“For God so loved the world . . .” she recited as if the words were notes on a musical scale with tones that sounded like wind chimes. The audience was rapt. It was moving. And then she concluded the verse with the breathiness of a skilled actress . . .

“And whoever believes in Him will have EVER-LAUGHING life!”

The audience roared again, and I was forever changed. In this sweet and unexpected moment, little Bailey introduced a concept that I’ll never forget—and never give up on. Ever-Laughing Life! I want that, don’t you?!

The reason we can have “ever-laughing life” is because we can have “everlasting life,” the hope of heaven. When we have the Son, we have life (1 John 5:12). And we don’t get just the *duration* of “everlasting life,” we get the *delight* of ever-laughing life. And I’m not just saying that because a little girl happened to declare something cute on a stage. I’m saying this because Jesus Himself promises it: “God blesses you who weep now, for in due time you will laugh” (Luke 6:21 NLT).

When we consider Jesus’s words, we naturally believe it for our fate in the afterlife. We know heaven is an always-joyful place where crying and pain is no more, and we are granted shouts of gladness instead of mourning (Rev. 21:4; Isa. 61:3). But what about right now? Does “ever-laughing life” apply to *this* side of heaven?

Yes! John 17:3 encourages us: “This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and the one you have sent—Jesus Christ.” Do you currently know the true God and the One He sent, Jesus Christ? Then you currently have eternal life. Or consider John 5:24: “Truly I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not come under judgment but has passed from death to life.” Not “will have” eternal life. Currently “*has*.” Though you haven’t experienced death yet in real time, in God’s mind you are as good as “passed from death to life.”

Eternal life will be fully experienced in the next life, but its beginnings unfold the minute we come to Christ. It’s not something you hope *might* pan out for you one day, far into eternity. No. Because you know Jesus presently, you experience the firstfruits (including laughter!) of eternal life *now*. This means, friend, that Jesus didn’t just die to bring you to heaven someday; He died to bring heaven, with all its hope and abundance, to you on this day.

Since we've been given everlasting life through Christ, we can enjoy ever-laughing life on earth. Even on the hard days, because we know Jesus now and we know our radiant future, we can say with all believers of all times and places, "Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy" (Ps. 126:2 NIV).

My friend, don't settle for less than that. Don't approach your days here on earth with drudgery, as if you are fulfilling your life sentence waiting for heaven. Instead, like little Bailey, take delight in the reality of your everlasting life in Christ. Let it translate into ever-laughing life every day.

LORD, thank You for giving me everlasting life and ever-laughing life. Help me to capture the grace of every day and grow in awareness of the joy that is in Your presence. May my life be a platform displaying that Your kingdom has come and Your will is being done here on earth as it is in heaven. AMEN.