

Joni Eareckson Tada Describes Her Personal Glimpse of Heaven

In his letter to the Colossians, the apostle Paul tells us, “Let heaven fill your thoughts; don’t spend your time worrying about things down here ... Your real life is in heaven with Christ and God” (Col. 3:2–3, TLB).

For years I’ve been trying to do that. With all my heart I want to think about my “real life” with God’s Son and the place He is preparing for me. But I don’t often succeed—not nearly as much as I would like to. For so much of the time, so many other things fill my thoughts: worries, regrets, fears, frustrations and all sorts of earthly, here-and-now, Joni-centered things.

But there are moments ...

Something I see, hear, dream or remember will open my spirit like a shutter. In those breathless intervals, I slip from my temporary earthbound citizenship to my true and rightful one. For several heartbeats, I catch a glimpse of another Reality, inhale the fragrance of a better country and sense a moment in time that’s somehow beyond time.

And it feels like home.

Always, when something like that would happen, I would try to capture the experience, bottle it up, tuck it away in a secret place, or even slip it into a Ziploc bag (to open and experience all over again). But I was never able to do it.

All that changed when I read something in C. S. Lewis’ last book. He made a passing reference to the poet William Blake and spoke about joy and how we must “kiss it as it flies.”

I had to look that up to see what it meant. The actual four-line poem goes like this:

“He who binds to himself a joy/ Does the winged life destroy;

But he who kisses the joy as it flies/ Lives in Eternity’s sunrise.”

I’m not positive what Blake or Lewis meant by that, but here’s what occurs to me. You can revel in heart-melting moments of beauty, inexpressibly lovely dreams, and even happy times of companionship with Jesus, but you can’t freeze time to hold on to them. If you tried to wrap your fingers around them, capture them in a golden cage or encase them in amber, you would only kill them.

What do you do with those rare golden moments of life when you are swept into wonder or joy bubbles up in your heart like an artesian spring?

You savor them.

You humbly thank God for them. And you let them go.

I recall a time this happened to me out on my back porch on a clear cold night. After searching the stars to find Ursa Major, I simply let my spirit soar. That was when I had the unworldly experience of hearing some faint, mysterious strain of music. It wasn’t from the neighbor’s house, and it wasn’t the TV in the family room. It was in the moment; it was in the heavens; it was for my ears only; and it created a deep, unspeakable, half-joyful, half-sorrowful longing for heaven.

It broke my heart, and it healed my heart, and then it was gone.

I couldn’t cling to that moment, and to this day I can’t recall a single note of that celestial music. As much as I treasure the memory of those few seconds, nothing quite like that has ever happened to me again.

I have a friend who described his first raft trip down a wild river in the remote backcountry of Oregon. As the raft swept along in the rapid current, he would fill his eyes with a rugged vista unlike anything he had ever seen. Keeping his eyes pinned on the sight, he would soon find himself facing sideways and then backward as the beautiful tableau swept by. But facing backward to see what was now departing behind him, he realized that he was missing the next beautiful scene around the next bend in the river.

He couldn't stop the river. He couldn't freeze the moment. And he soon realized that he had to taste and treasure each scene as it filled his eyes ... and then quickly let it go.

So it is with those heart-lifting moments when the Lord allows you the tiniest glimpse into your future home. Heaven fills your thoughts, as Scripture says, but it's not like a snapshot you can put on your refrigerator. It's not like a shrine that you come back to. It's just a shaft of grace through a quick opening in the clouds.

And there will be more. {eoa}

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