

## O Beulah Land- June's Hymn of the Month 2024

By  
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Summertime brings thoughts of outdoor activities, including the annual pilgrimage to summer camp meetings. Up and down the northeast coast, summer meeting camps would flourish in the late 1800's; but in particular, one would catch the nation's attention: Ocean Grove, New Jersey. It was here at this famous Methodist camp meeting that a hymn would be written in 1875.

Our story begins south of Ocean Grove in Cape May, New Jersey. Edgar Page Stites was born in 1836 at Cape May where his ancestors had settled after coming over on the Mayflower. Edgar was converted to Christ at the age of 19 during the great revival of Philadelphia, often called the Awakening of 1857 and 1858. Shortly thereafter, he joined the Methodist Church of Cape May and became a local "lay pastor." As a home missionary, he also was involved in the starting of new churches in the South Jersey area. Then, in 1870, Stites, along with other Methodist ministers and laymen, founded the "Ocean Grove Camp Meeting Association." By 1875, the camp ground was developing tents, summer cabins, and even homes of a permanent nature.

Music played an important part at the Grove meetings. The most popular songwriters at that time would visit each summer: Sankey, Doane, Kirkpatrick, Sweeney, Hewitt and Fanny Crosby—just to name a few. Even our Edgar would write a hymn in 1874, *Trusting Jesus, That Is All*; and Ira Sankey would set it to music. Truly the "grove summers" were a foretaste of what Heaven would be someday.

With each new summer, Stites looked forward to what the Lord was going to do at Ocean Grove. Then, in the summer of 1875, the Lord moved upon the heart of Edgar Page Stites. After the first day of meetings, he returned to his cottage and exclaimed, "All this and Heaven too!" There under the light of a kerosene lamp, he started to write, "I've reached the land of corn and wine and all its riches fully mine; here shines undimmed one blissful day for all my night has passed away." His pen would pour out three more stanzas; and then as if seeing beyond this life, he added this chorus which is the hope that is found in Christ and Christ alone:

O Beulah land, sweet Beulah land!  
As on thy highest mount I stand,  
I look away across the sea where mansions are prepared for me  
And view the shining glory shore  
My heaven, my home forever more.