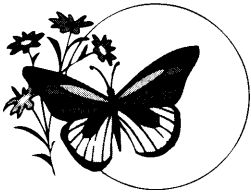


# Hymn of Promise

a hymn study by Michael Bedford



Last autumn do you remember watching the leaves turn? First, they were bright shades of red, orange, and yellow. But then they faded to brown and fell lifeless from the trees. As winter drew near, those same trees seemed to die right before our eyes. Grass yellowed. Flowers withered. The whole world lay cold and bare.



But even in the darkest hours God's hand is at work! We know that when spring comes around again, the trees will sprout new leaves, fresh green grass will appear, and those same flowers that disappeared from view will reappear clothed in glorious colors. During those chilly winter months when everything seems to die, God is actually nourishing it all until time for new life to form.

Take a moment to open your Bible and read Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8. This beautiful scripture talks about how everything has a time and place. Notice the pairings of opposites: to be born/to die, to plant/to pluck, to kill/to heal, to weep/to laugh, to mourn/to dance. This is God's way of letting us know that both good and bad things are going to happen, but in the worst of times God will never leave us.

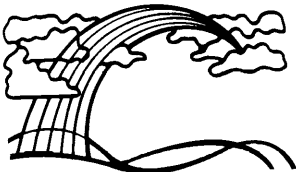
One of the most beloved composers of sacred music in our country today, Natalie Sleeth, was also an exceptional poet who wrote *all the words to her own anthems!* That's right. She never borrowed another text, though there are many around that are worthwhile. Read aloud the text of her beautiful "Hymn of Promise." Do you notice some other word pairings? Here we find the idea of something leading to something else. Because one thing happened, another thing is able to take place. List some of your favorites below.

\_\_\_\_\_ leads to \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ leads to \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ leads to \_\_\_\_\_

Since the word "hymn" was used in the title of this anthem, it has become a part of several hymnals. As with all of Ms. Sleeth's melodies, this one is easily learned and sung. Notice in the first two lines how each new phrase begins with two eighth notes on middle C. Can you find other similarities in melody and rhythm?



When Natalie Sleeth's husband died, this lovely anthem was used at his funeral. She also had it sung at her funeral when she died. Why do you think she wanted to have this hymn sung at these services? Probably because it reminds us that even as spring follows winter, eternal life with God is ours when we die. This is one of the most comforting parts of our Christian faith!

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