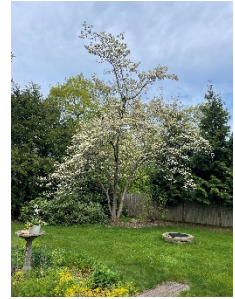


My dogwood tree suffers from blight. For the past 14 years, shortly after it blossoms, the blooms turn brown, and the leaves wither. Dr. Google said there was nothing I could do. The blight would eventually kill the tree. Newer dogwoods are bred to be blight resistant. The one thing I could do was clean out around the base of the tree.

This spring, shortly after my dogwood tree bloomed, I was having devotions outside. Its beauty caused me to pray something like, 'thank you God for the beauty in creation. Such beauty points to the splendor of your glory.'



I had just read in my devotions about when Jesus cursed the fig tree, and it withered. I felt like God whispered to my spirit, 'Go ahead, ask me.'

I knew it was God's voice. I hesitated – it was such a little thing. I prayed, 'Dear God, when I see this tree I think of you. Be healed so that your glory and your splendor can be seen. Blight be gone.'

As the days turned into weeks the leaves did not wither. I love these Holy Spirit initiated miracles.

On vacation, I tried to see if the leaves were still normal from a Ring Camera.

After we got home, we sat outside. Mom said, 'your dogwood tree sure looks healthy.'

God healed what I could not. Not because the tree mattered most, but because He wanted my eyes on Him.

Today is a call for us to keep our eyes on Jesus.

You might believe I shared that story to illustrate faith.

- Yes, we should believe that God still does miracles and have faith when he says to 'believe.' God can do anything.
- 'Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, *if you have faith* and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, ... ²² If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer (Mt 21:21-22 NIV)."'

But, no, I shared that story because it reminded me of a moment in Scripture when God's people faced something they could not fix – all they could do was keep their eyes on God.

Today, God's word is going to *encourage someone* who is in need.

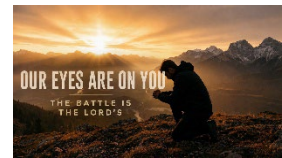
Then, we are going to **celebrate what God** has done to help us get debt free. It is a huge victory. I believe CIC is at a strategic change point – a point of miracle or new life.

Finally, we are going to **encircle CIC**, its property, and its people in prayer.

Welcome to CIC.

The Battle is the LORDs

Our Eyes Are On You



Let's jump into a story of the ancients waiting and keeping their eyes on God.

1. Jehoshaphat, 2Ch 20.

The story begins with King **Jehoshaphat** of Judah hearing that three groups have formed 'a vast army (v. 2)' to war against him: Moabites, Ammonites, Meunites.

Jehoshaphat was **terrified** and *called* for prayer and fasting. They **gathered and stood** in prayer waiting on God. Jehoshaphat said, "'We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.'"

¹³ All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the LORD (2Ch 20:12-14 NIV).'

- Emotions are high.
- They are afraid.
- No big stage-driven performance, no celebrity preachers, no worship band ...
- All they can do is look to heaven, wait, listen, and obey.

I love that phrase, 'our eyes are on you (2Ch 20:12 NIV).'

Baby ducks latch onto the first moving thing they see, they are deeply imprinted into relationship.

Human babies are far more complex.

- We **build attachment** over weeks and months through repeated sensory experiences with caregivers.
- Babies can **see only about 10" away** clearly but can *tell the difference* between faces they have seen for only one minute.

- We ‘process faces differently from objects right from the start ... (our) brains (are) primed for social connection.’¹

A **popular novel** right now has this delightful thought: ‘Do you recall the first time you leaned in close to look at your newborn daughter? Did you have a sense that you and she were both reaching toward each other somehow, to speak a language too deep for words?’²

Waiting on God is difficult. It is the most difficult thing for people to do. **Jehoshaphat’s greatest act of leadership was not strategy – it was surrender.** Surrender to God’s will.

Jehoshaphat could have followed the example of other kings of Israel ...

- **Like Gideon** (Jdg 7), we are going to get 300 of you and gather some trumpets, torches and clay jars.
- **Like David** (1Sa 17), we are going to pick a champion to go and challenge their best man. The winner will determine the war.
- Like **Samson** (Jdg 14-16), everyone should bring a donkey jawbone tomorrow morning.

Instead, he waited.

I long for the day **when God turns towards** me.

- ‘The LORD bless you ... ²⁵ the LORD make *his face shine* on you ... ²⁶ The LORD turn *his face toward* you and give you peace (Nu 6:22 NIV).’
- ‘Now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see *face to face* (1Co 13:12 NIV).’
- Everything within us **wants to do something**. **Clear out the base of my tree.**
Blight, again.

Instead, they **stood there** before God. They **waited**. ‘Then the Spirit of the LORD came on Jahaziel ... ¹⁵ He said: “Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says to you: ‘Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s (2Ch 20:14–15 NIV).’

Jahaziel told Jehoshaphat that **he would not have to fight**. You will see God’s victory.

The **people shouted praise** to God. The next morning Judah’s army went out.

- Jehoshaphat told the soldiers to **have faith**.
- He had the army **sing praise songs** as they went.

¹ ‘Do Babies Imprint Like Animals? The Science of Bonding,’ scienceinsights.org (March 5, 2026). Accessed 7-31-26.

² Allen Levi, *Theo of Golden* (New York, NY: Atria Paperback, 2023) 309.

- When they got to **the battlefield**, they saw only dead soldiers.
- During the night the **three armies turned on each other** and killed each other completely.
- There was **so much plunder** that it took three days to pick it all up.

This is an important lesson for us.

- Sometimes we are **called to fight** – like Gideon, Samson, David - and at other times we must wait.
- The main thing is to **keep our eyes on Jesus**. *If we do that, everything will be okay.*

2. If the Battle is the LORDs, then ...

If the battle is the Lords, then two things:

1. When I can do nothing, God can do anything.

We are **called to be faithful** servants *but sometimes* we find ourselves in situations where we can do nothing to help and *might even find* ourselves **fighting against God**.

- 'We can make our plans, *but the Lord determines* our steps (Pro 16:9 NLT).'
- 'You can make many plans, but the Lord's purpose will prevail (Pro 19:21 NLT).'
- 'I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow (1Co 3:6 NLT).'
- 'You who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit" — ¹⁴yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. ¹⁵Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." ¹⁶As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil (Ja 4:13-16 ESV).'

2. When I stay connected to Jesus, fruit always comes.

I cannot help but think of Jesus' illustration of the vine: 'I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing (Jn 15:5 NIV).'

- Ouch, 'apart from me you can do nothing.' **We can do quite a bit**, but *nothing of value* is done without Jesus.
- We **can faithfully clean around the tree – maybe even for 14 years – but until the LORD says, 'go ahead, ask me' – there will be no change.**

Conclusion / Application.

Whatever surrounds you today – sickness, financial trouble, relationship issues – **keep your eyes on Jesus**.

- You might be **living in fear**, thinking ‘the enemy has surrounded me.’ Keep your eyes on Jesus.
- You might **not see any response** to your prayer. Keep your eyes on Jesus.
- You might not be **able to foresee how your story** will end. Keep your eyes on Jesus.

‘And we know that in all things God works for the good *of those who love him*, who have been called according to his purpose (Ro 8:28 NIV).’ **The key** is to love him, keep our eyes on him, to abide in him.

Communion is one way we lift our eyes to him.

Communion.

- Just as God healed what I could not heal ...
- Just as God fought the battle Jehoshaphat could not fight ...
- Today we celebrate a victory God has given us – freedom from debt.
- **Let this be a moment when you lift your eyes to Jesus, He is faithful.**

‘May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—²³I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity (Jn 17:21-23 NIV).’

‘While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; this is my body.” ²³ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. ²⁴ “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,” he said to them. ²⁵ “Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God (Mk 14:22-25 NLT).”

Pray

When I read the NT I **see a church that is focused** on Jesus and his story and *not* **buildings**.

- However, in our American context buildings are important, but they are not the main thing.

Debt Elimination Celebration

I want the Finance Ministry Team, the Church Council and Bob Truitt to come to the platform. I want to honor **Anthony Fiorillo** as well, who was on the Church Board at the time the decision was made to build.

As of today, **we are at a turning point**.

- We are **free from** the encumbrance of a large mortgage.

- We will **have greater freedom** to minister. Our **finances have been loosed** for ministry.

I encourage you to get out of debt. Solomon wrote, 'The borrower is slave to the lender (Pro 22:7 NIV).' This **debt has affected the ministries** of both CIC and DCA for 24 years.

Everyone should **be very cautious incurring debt**, and then we should **do everything** we can do to get out of it.

Paul said to slaves, 'If you can gain your freedom, do so (1Co 7:21 NIV).'

Today, we celebrate CIC and DCA's freedom from debt. We are no longer a slave to the banks.

Here is the history of our mortgage debt:

Total indebtedness paid down by CIC since 2002: In 2000 SAAG decided to move forward with building a school building for DCA, it was to be called the DVJ building. We started with ...

(Started with \$600,000.00 cash & \$2,050,000.00 from a bond-based capital campaign [1999/2000].)

I am sure the project started with prayer and a shout of joy, like in Ezra's day when the foundation for the second Temple was laid (Ez 3:12). Here are a few construction photos:



In 2002, as the building neared completion and occupancy in the fall, a \$200,000 loan was obtained for furnishings: lockers, dry erase boards, etc.

Furnishings \$200,000.00 (2002)

DCA **occupied** the DVJ building in February 2001. Praise the Lord. Getting a building complete to its Certificate of Occupancy is no small feat for a church in New England.

Shortly after this, as is **common practice** for construction, all the debt was consolidated into one \$2m mortgage.

Mortgage \$2,000,000.00 (2002)

This mortgage was quietly being paid down when in 2008, an additional mortgage was obtained to purchase the white house. SAAG began paying two mortgages: the \$2m and the \$310k.

White House \$310,500.00 (2008)

In 2010, another \$300,000.00 was added to \$2m mortgage to remodel the sanctuary, do needed parking lot work, and add economizers to DCA's HVAC systems.

Repairs \$300,000.00 (2010)

Therefore, the overall amount borrowed over the years was ...

Total \$2,860,500.00 + interest

Praise God. He has given us the ability to pay this down. Today, he confirms his promise made 26 or so years ago (Dt 8:18).

We are now going to shred a copy of the mortgage and then we are going to give a shout of praise.

Shred / Praise / Prayer of Thanksgiving.

I know from experience that **Satan does not want** a church like ours unified and free to operate.

- This is not only a **moment of celebration**, *but also* a moment of Satan's fury.
- Satan likes to divide and cause all sorts of trouble.
- Gossip, agendas, position-seeking, or lack of love can all be used to hinder God's work.

The most furious attack from Satan came when we finished the building project in Connecticut. As the area pastors said, there was not a new church successfully started in the area for 150 years. These area pastors opposed my predecessors who had two failed building programs.

The night we got our certificate of occupancy we were having a prayer meeting. There were a handful of us and when the inspector walked in on our prayer meeting. He did the inspection and told me I needed a few items – minor items (keyed lock to the lower, unfinished level). He signed the CO and handed it to me and got in his red truck and drove off. The assistant inspector – a long story - walked off unleashing a torrid of vulgarity.

I returned to the paused prayer meeting. We knelt at the altar and thanked God for his favor. While I was praying, either a demon or Satan himself said to me, 'You think this is good? Just wait. Watch this.' And at that very moment I herniated a disk in my neck.

The first years in that building were wild. We had 20% growth, but we had two different threats that someone wanted to come in with a gun and shoot us up. We had demonic apparitions in the sanctuary.

One Friday afternoon, I ran up into the Sanctuary to get something before I left. With my peripheral vision I saw something weird in the ceiling. But because I was in a hurry and the car was running I did not think anything more about it. The next morning, I got a frantic call from the cleaning crew saying there was a demon in the sanctuary, and they were not going back in until there was an exorcism.

We can **expect spiritual pushbacks** as we catch our breath and begin to advance.

However, we must keep our eyes on Jesus and pray hard.

Therefore, we are now going to do a prayer walk around the property. We will walk around the circumference and have another shout of praise outside the front here and have a final prayer out front.

- The **children** will be joining you now.
- If you have an **infant**, Ashly is going to continue caring for them. She will pull them around with a wagon.
- If you choose **not to walk** the circumference of the property, please go outside in about 10 minutes. We will raise a shout and final prayer outside.

