

Judson Cornwall Finds New Ministry Opportunity Among the Blind

The terminally ill Bible teacher is 'bringing the blind to a closer walk with the Lord' by recording his books on tape

A renowned Pentecostal Bible teacher whose itinerant ministry ended nearly two years ago when he was diagnosed with terminal cancer has found a new audience with the blind. Friends, family and the head of a blind ministry say both Judson Cornwall and the visually impaired are being blessed since he started recording his books on tape.

"In my opinion he has a new ministry," said Ruth Berry Versaw, who has operated the Oklahoma City-based Library for the Blind for 16 years. "I told him recently via e-mail, 'You are traveling and giving the Word of God all over the country via tape.' He's touching lives and bringing the blind to a closer walk with the Lord."

Cornwall told Charisma: "I am very limited in strength and am doing my best to use that strength to bless the body of Christ. ... I am pleasantly surprised that the blind are enjoying my books on tape."

A popular author and speaker, particularly during the 1970s and '80s, Cornwall is regarded by many as a Bible teacher with revelatory insight into Scripture. The 78-year-old was preaching in Texas in July 2001 when he suffered excruciating pain in his back. After returning home to Phoenix, Cornwall was diagnosed with inoperable cancer on his spine.

"A doctor told him to go home and die," said Terri Gargis, who has been Cornwall's secretary for 16 years. "He's been under hospice care ever since."

Taking morphine for pain, Cornwall has not received chemotherapy or radiation treatment, Gargis said. The disease curtailed Cornwall's ministry, which included speaking engagements at four churches each month before he fell ill. A third generation Assemblies of God preacher who has been ministering worldwide for more than 20 years, Cornwall would sometimes be away from home for a month solid.

"He was traveling all the time and was a workaholic, and all of that stopped," Gargis, 58, said. Noting that Cornwall "needed something to do," she said the idea for him to read his books on tape came about last year, partly "out of boredom."

"Ruth Versaw had mentioned in an e-mail about other authors reading their books to tape," said Cornwall, who has written nearly 60 books, several of which have been translated into other languages. "I prayed about it and felt the Lord spoke to me to read my works on tape for her library."

Since he recorded his first book seven months ago, Cornwall has recorded 31 books, including his most recent, Forbidden Glory. Other books he has read on tape include Let Us Worship, Elements of Worship and Praying the Scriptures.

Gargis said each book took Cornwall about four hours to record. She said he has stopped recording because of the cancer pain. He is mostly confined to sitting in his recliner to ease the pain in his back. "His heart still wants him to do

something, but his body won't let him," she said, noting that Cornwall paid for the blank tapes, and he does not receive a fee for the recordings.

Versaw, who is legally blind, told Charisma that the blind were "very excited" because it's rare for authors to read their own book. "When [Cornwall] reads [one of] his books, he reads it like it was meant to be read," said Versaw, whose free lending library features 8,000 sermons, and fiction and nonfiction books from ministers and Christian authors of various denominations.

"One lady who wrote me said, 'The minute I hear him reading, I feel the Holy Spirit coming into the room,'" said Versaw, 73, adding that Cornwall's books on tape are "extremely popular." "He sure has touched the lives of the blind."

Cornwall's wife of 60 years, Eleanor, calls his new ministry "wonderful." "I had a blind aunt who loved to listen to Judson's sermons on tape," she said. "She would have been thrilled to listen to him reading his books had she lived long enough."

Gargis added: "Judson puts so much of himself in the reading, and he has a great voice for it. In one book, he actually had to apologize for crying."

Cornwall's sister, Iverna Tompkins, a respected Bible teacher and conference speaker, told Charisma that she is not surprised God is using him in a new way because most of his life "has been given to help those who have ears to hear the Word of the Lord."

“Our Lord never wastes anything, and He has given Judson a wealth of understanding and a heart to teach,” Tompkins, 73, said. “Until he draws his last breath, he will be loving and sharing with someone because he is a gift to the body of Christ, and he takes that very seriously.”

Tompkins said Cornwall is dying with “great grace and a rejoicing heart,” adding that he “has always shown us how to live, now he is showing us how to die.”

Eric Tiansay