



# DOUG CORBETT

is supposed to be dead. In 1985, Corbett, wife Beverly, and their three young daughters moved to Springfield, Mo., to itinerate for the mission field. Only weeks into the process, Corbett noticed he became easily fatigued and the small lumps on his neck had become prominent. He figured he had the flu. His doctor said it was probably mononucleosis and wrote a prescription for penicillin. The doctor also had Corbett's white blood cells counted.

The count was high, so another

white cell test was done. It too came back high so a biopsy of the lumps on Corbett's neck was ordered. The biopsy revealed malignant lymphoma, a cancer of the immune system. Even worse, the doctor said the cancer was at stage four — usually the last stage before a person dies. Corbett was only 31. "I told the doctor I couldn't be sick because I was going to Africa to be a missionary," says Corbett. The doctor told Corbett if he wanted to live he needed to

# CANCER SURVIVOR GIVES THANKS

Article and photos by Kirk Noonan

endure the strongest doses of chemotherapy offered for six months. Corbett complied and began treatment. His hair fell out and he spent several days each week vomiting and feeling nauseated. As the weeks passed he took on a gaunt and ashen look.

Despite his appearance, Corbett kept preaching and raising money for his assignment in Africa. "People looked at me sympathetically," he recalls. "But I don't think all of them believed I was going to live, let alone make it to Africa."

As Corbett struggled through the intense therapy he vacillated from denial to anger. He frequently questioned why God would put a call on his life to serve as a missionary if he was only going to die.

"I wanted to go to the mission field," Corbett explains. "But I finally came around to acceptance of my cancer and began viewing it as just another one of life's hurdles." Doing that helped Corbett focus on things worth living for — mainly his family.

"When I thought of them I knew I'd do whatever it took to beat the cancer," he says. And he did. Six months after being diagnosed, Corbett was declared cancer-free. He celebrated by

threading his near-death struggle into his sermons and telling everyone he met how God healed him.

A little more than a year later, the Corbetts landed in Sierra Leone, grateful for God's healing touch and excited about the prospect of serving as leaders of a Bible school in Freetown.

But within days of arriving, Corbett began to doubt his calling.

## ANOTHER TEST

In Freetown the weather was insufferable. Though English was the official language, Corbett learned that British Creole was the market- and most-used language. Running water was a luxury the family only had a few hours a day and electricity came and went with no warning.

"The first six weeks were torture and I remember saying, 'I think I missed God on this one,'" admits Corbett.

Overhearing their father grouse about the predicament he had put the family in, Corbett's daughters bounded into his room and told him he needed to give the people of Sierra Leone a chance. Their intervention lifted his spirits.

Corbett plunged into the life and work Sierra Leone had to offer. The family adjusted, and the ministry grew strong. But all was not well.

Corbett began having excruciating back pain, and lumps — that hurt when touched — appeared on his scalp. The family returned to the States and doctors confirmed their worst fears. The cancer had returned.

"It's harder the second time," says Corbett. "I knew what to expect and dreaded it. I didn't want to go through it again."

This time the doctor prescribed only four months of intense chemotherapy. Like he had done before, Corbett searched for some motivating factor to carry him through the process. He found it, when he realized his desire to be in Africa was greater than ever.

Determined to conquer the cancer and return to the mission

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Doug Corbett (right) delivers supplies in Peru after an 8.0-magnitude earthquake rocked the country in August.

# TRAIN UP A CHILD



Train a child  
in the way he should go,  
and when he is old  
he will not turn from it.

Proverbs 22:6

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## CANCER SURVIVOR

field he underwent chemotherapy and was declared cancer-free, but ordered to stay in the States to recover. In those months of recovery the cancerous tumors returned — but this time, they were bigger and more aggressive.

Corbett was informed he needed radiation treatments that could save his life, but carried numerous side effects. The radiation, his doctor said, would kill all of the hair follicles on his head.

“That shocked me more than anything,” Corbett says. “I don’t know why, but I had always had hair and couldn’t see myself bald.”

After months of treatment Corbett not only lost his hair, the radiation permanently closed his sweat glands and left oozing, open sores on his head. But once again the doctor declared him free of cancer.

### NEW CALLING

Corbett was eager to get back to Africa, but the doctor said Sierra Leone’s tropical climate and malaria problem could prove deadly for him. As a compromise, Corbett moved the family to Durban, South Africa, where the climate was milder and likelihood of contracting malaria lower.

Less than two years into the term the cancer came back. This time in Corbett’s legs. The family again returned to the States, and Corbett endured 23 additional radiation treatments that killed the cancer but left his left leg badly scarred.

During the long months of recovery Corbett’s will to live waned. He was tired of fighting for his life and disheartened he was no longer in Africa.

Yet his outlook changed when he was offered a position at Central Bible College in Springfield as a missionary in residence. At CBC he would teach missions classes and mentor young people who had set their sights on becoming missionaries.

Corbett gladly accepted the position. Encouraging and teaching students became his new calling. But in 1995, he discovered a bump on his forehead that turned out to be a malignant tumor.

Since Corbett had only been in remission for nine months, his doctor recommended a bone marrow transplant. Corbett did not hesitate. He wanted to live, at least until October of that year, so he could see his first grandchild born.

That July, Corbett’s bone marrow was extracted, treated, harvested, frozen then put back in his body.

Meanwhile, Corbett received chemotherapy and then was isolated until the marrow was reintroduced into his body.

By September he was released from the hospital cancer-free once again. A month later his first grandchild was born.

### GIVE THANKS

On a recent afternoon at Convoy of Hope headquarters in Springfield, Corbett was asked during a chapel service to share what he was thankful for.

“I am thankful for the 22 years God gave me since I was first

diagnosed with cancer,” Corbett, 53, an international project director for COH, told his colleagues. “I don’t know why God let me live other than His grace, but I feel obligated to do His work.”

If the cancer returns, Corbett says he is not sure he has the willpower to put up much of a fight. But then he considers his words.

“Unless of course one of my daughters gets pregnant again,” he says. “Then I’d have to stick around to see the baby.”

Faith, family and health. Each is reason enough for Corbett to express his gratitude this Thanksgiving. **tpe**

KIRK NOONAN is managing editor of *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*.

**tpe**extra

Visit [tpe.ag.org](http://tpe.ag.org) for an audio interview with Doug Corbett.

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