

# A Modern-Day Mordecai

***Publisher's Note:*** J. Lee Grady has been part of the *Charisma* family since 1992. Early this year, after 11 years as editor, his role changed to contributing editor, prompting many readers to ask where he had gone. Lee is still a vital part of *Charisma*, as you'll read in this article, but he is also embracing a bold new season of ministry. As he does, please pray for him and consider supporting his incredible vision.

—Steve Strang

**J. Lee Grady, the former award-winning editor of *Charisma*, travels the world today rallying women to bravely serve God. What made this easygoing journalist an advocate for biblical equality?**

Former *Charisma* editor J. Lee Grady spent the first half of his career sitting behind a desk. Today you are more apt to see him behind a pulpit—challenging the abuse of women in a Third World nation.

How did this mild-mannered journalist become a passionate crusader for justice? Ironically, Grady says, it all started with letters from readers of *Charisma*.

“Any time we ran a story on a high-profile teacher like Joyce Meyer or a female pastor of a church, I’d brace myself because I knew what kind of letters we’d get,” says Grady, who began his career at *Charisma* as news editor in 1992 and served as editor from 1999 to 2010. “Dozens of well-meaning people would write letters, citing Scriptures taken out of context, to attack the notion of women being allowed to minister in church.”

- ✖ Rather than deal with more letters, Grady decided to address the issue head-on by inviting a popular woman

pastor from Virginia to write an article for the magazine explaining the biblical case for women in ministry. "Her response blew me away," he recalls. "She refused to write about it, instead challenging anyone who had issue with her doing what God had called her to do to come see her work and oppose her in person. I hung up the phone feeling disappointed, and yet I could not get away from feeling we needed to write about this subject."

In the quietness of Grady's office, the Holy Spirit then whispered something that changed the course of his life and ministry.

"Why don't you defend her?"

Grady recognized these words as a divine directive. The subject of women ministers was dear to his heart because he and his wife of 26 years, Deborah, have raised four daughters. But as he studied the Scriptures and read many books on the topic, it became clear that what needed to be said would not fit in an article.

It became a book instead—*10 Lies the Church Tells Women*—which was published by Charisma House in 2000. It has since sold almost 65,000 copies, 12,000 of them in Spanish, and has even been used as a textbook in some Christian college courses. The book opened amazing opportunities for Grady to travel to nations where women suffer unimaginable abuse and discrimination.

"Here in America, the church has issues with women in leadership," Grady explains. "But overseas, women barely have any rights. I found myself speaking to women who were being beaten by their husbands on a regular basis. Many of these women were not educated; some were illiterate; they were living almost as slaves, and the church was doing nothing and saying nothing."

If you ask Grady to share examples of this abuse, he has too

many to list. But here are a few:

- In India, women sometimes jump off bridges and kill themselves because their husbands are beating them—yet it is considered shameful to talk about the issue. “One Indian lady came to me in tears in 2008,” Grady says. “Her husband had threatened to drown her if she did not go to her parents and demand more dowry payment.”
- At a conference in Ukraine, Grady gave an altar call for women who had been sexually abused. “Almost every woman came to the front. The level of abuse is staggering,” Grady says.
- In Kampala, Uganda, most women who attended Grady’s conference in 2009 came from polygamous homes. Polygamy devalues women and leads to unthinkable abuse from husbands, Grady says.
- In one region of South Africa, AIDS-infected men buy young women from poor families to be wives because they believe they can be cured of the virus by having sex with a virgin.
- In Nigeria, widows are often evicted from their homes and thrown into the streets after their husbands die, and they are blamed for the deaths.
- In regions of Latin America, men regard wife beating as a normal part of culture—and it is tolerated in many churches. Grady has opposed this *machismo* mentality in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia.

So far, Grady has taken his message of liberation and healing to 24 countries. He has confronted almost every form of abuse against women including domestic violence, infanticide and gender-selective abortion, denial of education to girls, forced prostitution, female genital mutilation, mistreatment of widows and honor killings.

To champion his cause, Grady founded The Mordecai Project, an organization with a vision to educate and empower women as

well as to protect and heal them. Grady says the name of his ministry comes from his personal affinity with the biblical figure Mordecai, the cousin of Esther:

“Mordecai took care of Esther after she was orphaned,” he explains. “I believe God has called me to prod many of today’s Esthers into bold action. I believe my divine assignment is to rally God’s women and commission them for service.”

Grady believes women are oppressed and marginalized because the devil doesn’t want them to discover their potential in Christ.

“The devil is the one behind the false teaching that women are not supposed to be in ministry,” Grady says. “If we deny women their spiritual inheritance, and make them sit on the sidelines, this cuts the number of workers on the mission field by half.”

### **A Holy Spirit Encounter**

Grady was raised in the Deep South in Southern Baptist churches. He had a relationship with God as a teenager, but his spiritual life was energized at age 18 when he was baptized in the Holy Spirit. Not surprisingly, it was a Southern Baptist woman—a Sunday school teacher named June Leverette—who introduced him to this deeper spiritual experience at Grady’s church in suburban Atlanta.

“June spent three hours walking me through the Scriptures and explaining things about the Holy Spirit,” he says. “I took home an armload of books and poured over them for a week. Then I went to my church on a Sunday night, sat down on a bench on the volleyball court, raised my hands and asked God to fill me with His Spirit.”

Grady had never been to a charismatic service and had never heard anyone speaking in tongues. “I didn’t even know what the word *charismatic* meant. I thought it sounded like a back

problem!” Grady says. “But all of a sudden, the Lord zapped me! I suddenly had a strong hunger for the things of God. I wanted to pray, read my Bible and share my faith. And I drew much closer to the Lord as a result of this experience.”

After college Grady began a career in journalism that eventually led him to *Charisma*. During his 17-year tenure at the magazine he won numerous awards for his reporting and editorials, both from Christian and secular organizations. But when his book about women was released, he knew God was redirecting his focus on the mission field.

Grady says Steve and Joy Strang, the owners of *Charisma*, were gracious to allow him to reduce his hours on the magazine while he branched into ministry. He is also grateful to Joy because she gave him opportunities to speak at *Charisma* women’s conferences held in Florida from 1995 to 2004.

Gradually, the opportunities for him to minister internationally increased. Everywhere Grady went he left a footprint—a marked change in attitude and understanding that lasted, grew, and made a positive impact on families and churches.

- In Guatemala, pastors have publicly repented for beating their wives. In one community, a pastor released his daughter to have her own successful radio program for youth.
- In Peru, Grady spoke to the leaders of one church network in 2007 and challenged them to empower women for ministry. The following year, that organization sent out its first group of ordained women to plant churches in difficult mountain areas. In another Peruvian city, the chief of police for an entire province has invited Grady to devise a curriculum to train policemen in how to treat women with respect.
- In Egypt, Grady worked with a ministry to produce TV

programs that aired in Arabic in the Middle East. The DVDs of those messages made their way to Libya, where underground churches are learning about God's plan to heal abused women.

- In Nigeria, thousands of pastors knelt in a sports arena and apologized to women for marginalizing and oppressing them.

"This message is so empowering," says Grady, whose next  book, *10 Lies Men Believe*, is scheduled to release in January from Charisma House. "In the beginning God designed both men and women in His image. They were both created to exercise authority over all the earth. We lost that through sin, but when Jesus came, He restored us back to full authority—both men and women."

Grady says it was ultimately the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost that restored women to their full purpose. That's why he is adamant that women experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit. "At Pentecost, the same flame of the Holy Spirit burned on top of the heads of women and men. The New Testament church documents several female leaders—including Priscilla, Phoebe, and Euodia and Syntyche—and God also used women such as Deborah, Miriam and Huldah in the Old Testament."

Adds Grady: "The Scriptures that people use to forbid women from ministry were written about some unusual circumstances in the churches of Corinth and Ephesus. In context, they make sense; out of context, they have confused and belittled women for generations."

## **Making Disciples**

Grady's impact has also been felt here in the United States. Nicole Doyley of Rochester, N.Y., first heard Grady speak at her former church in New Hampshire, where she served as a staff pastor. She was stirred to the core when she recognized the valuable potential of single women in the church.

“Lee had just returned from China,” Doyley says, “and he spoke about the underground churches, and the fact that many of the churches were started by women—even single women. I was single at the time, and the message inspired me that single women, too, could do great things for the kingdom.”

Doyley later joined one of Grady’s ministry teams in Nigeria, where she spoke to churches on the topic of sexual purity. Eventually, after Doyley married, she started her own ministry, Ruth’s Company, and invited Grady to speak at her first conference.

Grady’s message has also made a profound impact on his own daughters. His oldest, Margaret Grady Turner, serves as associate campus pastor at Emmanuel College, a Christian school in north Georgia. She is sponsoring a conference in February to address the global oppression of women.

Seeing younger women such as Doyley and his daughter catch this vision is Grady’s biggest thrill. He hopes more and more men and women will join him in his efforts to confront abuse—through preaching, education and compassionate outreach.

Grady plans to partner with churches in the developing world to open 17 separate facilities for women, including a shelter for battered women in Colombia; a home for unwed mothers in Peru; and a women’s training institute in Coimbatore, India.

He needs at least \$1.7 million to launch these outreaches, but he is not daunted by the price tag because he knows God wants to touch the world’s invisible women with His love. Today Grady says he has no regrets about leaving his desk job.

“I don’t think any Third World nation will change until the women are educated and their gifts are used,” he says. “I want to provide a place where women deprived of education can finally learn, grow, and be used in business and ministry.”

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**Mary Hutchinson** *is a freelance writer and the president of Inspired Direct, a marketing company in Nashua, N.H.*

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