

The Journalist Who Became a Modern-Day Mordecai

For two baby girls in India, life almost ended in a public trash bin. That's where their parents dumped them right after they were born. Why? Because Noor and Parveen are girls—and in India, almost no one wants a girl. Girls are useless, not worthy of being educated, and on top of every other encumbrance, parents have to pay huge dowries when they marry. No wonder the greeting given to an Indian bride on her wedding day is, "May you be the mother of a hundred sons."

In many parts of the world, when a girl is born families literally declare a day of mourning. Newborn girls are often buried alive, suffocated under blankets, thrown to wild animals, burned with acid, dropped down wells or tossed into the ocean. Billboards across India advertise gender-selective abortions. Many girls in China are killed at birth—even in hospitals. Female infanticide is an accepted practice in many countries. If a girl somehow survives childhood, the abuse, hatred and gender-based discrimination doesn't end, even when she becomes a woman.

Thankfully when Noor and Parveen's parents dumped them in a public trash bin, Raja Kumar Undurthi, pastor of Mission Mobilization Church, heard their cries and rescued them. He brought them to Mordecai House, a Christian shelter where 33 girls now live. Every single one of the girls was abandoned by her parents, but here they receive healing from their past, education for their future and encouragement to transform nations.

Who would have thought that these two little girls' lives would be saved due to a former *Charisma* editor living halfway around the world who had a vision to empower women after editing articles about this. It was the beginning of a

ministry that is touching the world.

One day Raja took Noor and Parveen back to the trash bin so they would understand about their past. While they stood there, a group of people overheard Raja talking—and became enraged. It was not because of what happened to the girls, but because Raja had rescued them. “Why did you let them live?” the crowd screamed at Raja. “You should have died in this place!” they shrieked at the terrified girls.

Modern-Day Mordecai

Sadly Noor and Parveen’s story is not unique. All over the world, tens of millions of girls are in danger from the moment they’re conceived, explains Lee Grady, president of The Mordecai Project, which partnered with Raja and his wife, Padma, to support the home where Noor and Parveen live.

Grady named his ministry after Mordecai in the book of Esther, a man who challenged a young woman to action and then watched her transform a nation. Today Grady is a modern-day Mordecai who works in Guatemala, Peru, Uganda, India and many other countries where girls and women are oppressed simply for being females. “We go where gender oppression has created injustice and we bring the healing and compassion of Christ into those places,” Grady says.

Grady’s journey began right here at *Charisma*, where he served as the magazine’s editor for 11 years. He worked on thousands of articles, but one stands out from the others because it launched him into this calling. He remembers: “We were planning an article about women in leadership, and I asked a woman who pastored a megachurch to write about the biblical basis for that. Her response was blunt: ‘I’m tired of defending myself.’ ”

Her words echoed to Grady long after he hung up the phone. Who would defend her, he wondered. Finally the Lord spoke to him: “Why don’t you defend her?” Instead of an article, Grady wrote

a book, *10 Lies the Church Tells Women: How the Bible Has Been Misused to Keep Women in Spiritual Bondage* (Charisma House). It sold more than 100,000 copies in English, Spanish and several other languages.

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More books followed on the same theme along with ministry opportunities all over the world. When Grady spoke, God brought women to receive healing from gender-based violence including emotional, physical and sexual abuse—and also brought the men who abused them to repentance. Many of the abusers were pastors and church workers. There were so many opportunities and the Holy Spirit was bringing such freedom to abused and abuser alike that in 2010 Grady knew the time had come to turn the editor's desk over to someone else and launch into full-time ministry.

Today The Mordecai Project's vision is to empower women to succeed and in doing so transform nations. That is accomplished in part by building safe houses for girls and women who have suffered gender-based violence and helping them to heal, be educated, and be positioned to transform their own societies.

So far The Mordecai Project has initiated projects in Guatemala, Peru, Colombia and India. Grady is planning to launch similar projects in Malawi, El Salvador, Ecuador, Bolivia, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda and additional cities in India. He also plans to build homes in the U.S. for Native American women, in Canada for First Nation women and in Australia for aboriginal women. "In the U.S. the women with the highest percentage of abuse are Native American women living on reservations," he explains. "And when you look at

abuse against women in Canada, it's the native women who are at the top of the list." It's a similar crisis among aboriginal women in Australia.

In launching this "network of compassion projects," Grady's goal is partnership. First he identifies a local church with whom he already has a relationship. "I launch the project with them, but they own and operate it. I want it to be an indigenous, self-governing project." At the same time he links them with a church or ministry that will "fund it, visit it, support it and be part of building something significant."

"I haven't met anyone in all of my years of ministry who champions the cause and call of God's daughters like Lee Grady," says Quentin Beard, an Assemblies of God pastor from South Dakota who frequently ministers with Grady. "He truly believes that half the body of Christ has been displaced and disregarded."

Why All the Injustice?

Abuse against women happens everywhere—the developing world and the developed world, in families with high income and low income, with higher education and no education, in slums and in mansions. It takes many forms: sex abuse, rape, domestic violence, female infanticide, denial of education to girls, forced prostitution, sex trafficking, labor trafficking, female genital mutilation, mistreatment of widows, honor killings, making 8-year-old girls marry grown men, forcing women to wear heavy burkas in desert heat, or throwing acid on girls who dare to go to school.

Grady believes that injustice against girls and women is rooted in original sin. God told the first woman, "Your husband ... will rule over you" (Gen. 3:16). "The pain so many women experience today first entered into the world because of the curse of sin," Grady says. "It's a global problem that takes many different forms and manifestations."

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“Gender violence is a major social issue in our country,” explains Roxana Orellana de Pérez, who ministers to abused women in El Salvador. “Every 36 hours a woman (in El Salvador) is murdered. Three out of four women are victims of physical, verbal, emotional and sexual abuse that has damaged or denigrated (them) in a permanent and irreversible way. Two out of three girls and boys are sexually abused in El Salvador.”

Pérez says that Grady’s ministry to eradicate gender-based violence “is an inspiration for all of us women working for the cause. He has been a mentor and has ministered (to) many women and men in El Salvador who have been victims of abuse.”

In some cultures in Central and South America, women actually expect their husbands and boyfriends to abuse them. “*Machismo* is deeply rooted in our culture,” explains Nori Menendez, director of the Mordecai Project in Barranquilla, Colombia. “*Machismo* is the idea that men are superior, more intelligent and generally more qualified. As a result, they have the right to dominate, control or degrade women.”

When Grady confronts men who have abused women their entire lives—including pastors and other church workers—he does so by reading Scriptures such as 1 Peter 3:7. “That is addressed to husbands,” he explains, “and tells them if you are not treating your wife as an equal, God is not listening to your prayers. We want to preach that the husband is ‘head of the home,’ but that is not a Scripture. The Bible says the man is head of the wife, not head of the home. The husband and wife together are priests. We’re all priests, but we skip over these verses.

"The way you treat your wife has a lot of impact on how you relate to God," Grady tells men. "God basically switches His phone to the answering machine when you're abusing your wife or not treating her as an equal. I use those analogies when I preach to men and they're convicted and come to the altar."

Menendez says that Grady has played a powerful prophetic role in Colombia. "Many church leaders, men and women, have repented, realizing that during most of their lives they allowed and fostered *machismo* by misinterpreting many Bible passages. Lee and the Mordecai Project have brought about an awakening as defenders of women, and many women (are launched more freely into ministry."

Why hasn't the church done more to confront gender-based violence against women—not just outside the four walls but inside? "We can't go to the world and confront these problems until we confront them in our own churches," Grady emphasizes. "The church around the world has to be part of the solution; instead we're part of the problem."

Why Satan Keeps Women in Bondage

The mission statement of The Mordecai Project is "empowering women, confronting abuse, transforming nations." How do the first two result in the last one? "Because there are certain spiritual battles reserved for women," Grady says. "We have proven that the number one reason for systemic poverty in the developing world is lack of education of women. When women are educated and go to college, everything changes in those countries.

"The devil is totally behind all this injustice," Grady adds. "He doesn't want women to figure out who they are, to be protected or go to school because he knows what that will do to a country. Nations are going to be transformed when we release and harness the power of women."

Grady points to Malala Yousafzai, the teenager from Pakistan

who dared stand up to the Taliban's edict that girls cannot be educated. She took a bullet in her head as a result, almost killing her. Afterwards, Pakistan passed a Right to Education bill. And Malala won the Nobel Peace Prize—the youngest person ever to do so.

“Look at the dynamics of this,” Grady says. “Here's a girl who was a victim of oppression, yet she went on to change her nation. How much more do we need Spirit-filled women to do this—to step into this lion's den and take on the oppression of women and girls?”

Women must be empowered, equipped and set free to do what God has called them, says Paul Muzichuk with Servant Heart Mission. “The time in which we are living is too critical for us as men to debate the matter any further,” he insists. “It's time to release God's daughters for supernatural kingdom work. When God's daughters are released for His calling, a beautiful harmony of partnership, strategy and healing takes places in the fields of the Lord. We need women more than at any (other) time to rise up and be fully equipped to be God's ambassadors around the world.”

For women to do that, someone must defend them. Someone must rescue them from the 24/7 horrors that surround them. Someone must champion them to step into their destiny. Who will do that? Is the Holy Spirit calling you to be a Mordecai? Maybe He is asking you the same question He asked Grady: “Why don't you defend her?”

Diana Scimone is a journalist who has written extensively on injustice. She is founder of the Born2Fly Project to stop child trafficking, and author of many children's books, including *Born to Fly* and the *Adventures With PawPaw* series.

Discover more about The Mordecai Project as well as the injustices women face around the globe at .

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