

John Grisham - Still Just An Ordinary Man

by **Robyn Conley-Weaver**

As John Grisham and his family moved from town to town during his childhood, two things were always important to him: his involvement in sports and his spiritual life. In this respect, Grisham is still the same ordinary guy he was back then. His spiritual life is still a priority, he travels on missionary trips and he even devoted his latest book, "The Testament" to a religious theme.

The thing that has changed in Grisham's life is the not so ordinary success he's found as the most recognized name in the publishing and movie industries. His tenth novel, The Testament, hit the bookstores early this year and has been on the bestseller list ever since. It's a pattern that has followed each of his books since "The Firm" was published in 1991. He's enjoyed seeing major movie stars portray characters he has invented for his novels. He's had the privilege of seeing his books translated into 36 different languages.

His phenomenal success has secured him millions of loyal readers and millions of dollars. Through all the success, however, Grisham is most thankful for the spiritual foundation that had kept him an ordinary man. In an interview published in USA Today, Grisham agreed with the reporter that he was indeed lucky to have achieved so much fame and monetary rewards. Then Grisham added: "...and when it's all over I hope I can say it was a whole lot of fun, but I kept my feet on the ground and I didn't change."

Not changing has been a major focus for Grisham, and he credits his ability to do so based on his spiritual roots. Grisham is a private man, but those who know him best know that he is a man who believes strongly in the value of his relationship with God and living a life of integrity, even in his writing. This isn't always an easy choice with some authors, but Grisham is committed to his decision. He once emphasized his convictions like this:

"When I started writing, I made the simple decision to keep it clean. The decision was based on my Christian faith and a certain lifestyle I'm trying to maintain, and I've never been tempted or pushed to write otherwise."

These are strong and uncommon statements for a writer today, and Grisham's commitment was put to the test when he agreed to write the screenplay for The Gingerbread Man. By the time his original story went through the director's revisions, it was full of vulgarity that Grisham had not written or approved. He told the director to drop his name from the credits because the final version was nothing like the screenplay he turned in to the director.

Another area where his faith has crossed over into his success is how he uses the money he has earned from his literary works. He and his wife Renee have chosen several ways to put their enormous bank accounts to work in Christian endeavors.

"Both my wife and I have middle-class backgrounds, and we've struggled with the overnight financial rewards of being a best-selling author. We give a lot of money to churches, missions, charities."

Grisham not only shares his wealth, but he also shares his time by taking mission trips and putting his physical back to work along with his financial backing. The mission trips help him remain aware of how much he has and how little some other people have on which to survive each day. Some of these reflections of Grisham's came out from his

main character's perspective in his novel, "The Partner". Much of the book's setting took place in Brazil and many of the changes his character underwent were based on the Brazilian culture and its people. One of the main characters in "The Testament" is a missionary who inherits money she doesn't want from a father she barely knew.

It may be impossible to predict how many more characters that Grisham creates will testify to his faith or become focal points of best-selling novels. It is quite probable, however, to believe Grisham's own character has made him an anchor of success in the publishing industry - not only as a financial draw, but also as a man people enjoy doing business with. His friend and mentor, Donald Zacharias, president emeritus at Mississippi State University, describes the writer best: *"John is one of the most sincere and humble men I've ever met. Generous. With John, what you see is what you get."*

Today, John Grisham remains the same as when he began - an ordinary guy with strong moral values and a simple, yet enduring faith in God.

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