

Tenn. Judge Orders Parents to Change Baby's Name From Messiah

A Tennessee judge has ordered a baby's first name changed from *Messiah* to *Martin*, saying that the only true messiah is Jesus Christ, a ruling the boy's mother promises to appeal, a Tennessee television station has reported.

The parents of Messiah DeShawn Martin went before Tennessee Child Support Magistrate Lu Ann Ballew because they could not agree on the 7-month-old's last name.

Ballew instead last week ordered the baby's name changed to Martin DeShawn McCullough, the Tennessee television station WBIR reported.

"The word 'messiah' is a title, and it's a title that has only been earned by one person, and that one person is Jesus Christ," Ballew told WBIR.

Ballew, who could not be reached for comment on Sunday, said the child would likely struggle with his given first name because he lives in Cocke County, a predominantly Christian area in eastern Tennessee.

"It could put him at odds with a lot of people and, at this point, he has had no choice in what his name is," Ballew said.

Jaleesa Martin, the baby's mother, told WBIR she would appeal the judge's order.

"I didn't think a judge could change my baby's name because of her religious beliefs," Martin said.

Christianity refers to Jesus as the Messiah, while Judaism uses the term to mean an anticipated savior of the Jews.

Dictionary definitions say the word can mean one who is seen as, expected or professes to be a savior or liberator.

Messiah was the 387th most popular name for boys born in the United States in 2012, based on applications for Social Security cards filed with the U.S. Social Security Administration.

In all, there were 762 applications for boys named Messiah in 2012, up from 368 applications in 2011, the Social Security Administration said.

Reporting by Jonathan Kaminsky; Editing by David Bailey and Stacey Joyce

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For Richard Dawkins, Muslim-Bashing Is Different Than Christian-Bashing

Professor **Richard Dawkins**, known as the world's most famous **atheist**, has risen to rock-star status for his attacks on God and religion—in particular, his attacks on the God of the **Bible**. But when he recently criticized Muslims, he was in for a surprise.

Before looking at Dawkins' rather mild criticism of Muslims, let's remember the depth of his vitriol against Christians and the Bible, most of which has only enhanced Dawkins' reputation.

In an April interview aired on the Qatar-based TV network Al Jazeera, Dawkins railed on the Catholic Church, saying that as “horrible as sexual abuse no doubt was [suffered by some children at the hands of deviant priests], the damage was arguably less than the long-term psychological damage inflicted by bringing the child up Catholic in the first place.”

Was Dawkins really serious? The interviewer, Mehdi Hasan, asked, “You believe that being bought up as a Catholic is worse than being abused by a priest?”

Dawkins replied, “There are shades of being abused by a priest, and I quoted an example of a woman in America who wrote to me saying that when she was 7 years old, she was sexually abused by a priest in his car.

“At the same time, a friend of hers, also 7, who was of a Protestant family, died, and she was told that because her friend was Protestant, she had gone to hell and will be roasting in hell forever.

“She told me, of those two abuses, she got over the physical abuse; it was yucky, but she got over it. But the mental abuse of being told about hell, she took years to get over.”

Did non-Christians take offense at these outrageous comments about Catholics and Protestants? Hardly. This was considered vintage Dawkins.

In his best-selling book *The God Delusion*, Dawkins famously mocked the God of the Old Testament, claiming, “The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.”

This quote quickly became an atheist favorite, kind of an instant classic and part of Dawkins' legacy.

What about attacks on Allah? Did Dawkins attack him the same way?

According to a Feb. 24, 2013, article by Douglas Murray published in *The Jewish Chronicle Online*, "In a recent Al-Jazeera interview, Richard Dawkins was asked his views on God. He argued that the god of 'the Old Testament' is 'hideous' and 'a monster', and reiterated his claim from *The God Delusion* that the God of the Torah is the most unpleasant character 'in fiction'. Asked if he thought the same of the God of the Koran, Dawkins ducked the question, saying: 'Well, um, the God of the Koran I don't know so much about.'"

Or could it be that Dawkins wants to keep his head on his shoulders a little longer? Can you imagine how Muslims would react if he attacked Allah as a hideous monster?

In another context, Dawkins said, "I need to learn not to bend over backwards to be nice to faith-heads. Give these people an inch and they take a league. I think, as I did when I wrote *The God Delusion*, that the Roman Catholic Church is a disgusting institution, the second most evil religion in the world."

So, Dawkins was being "nice" when he wrote *The God Delusion* and not being as harsh as he should have been toward the Roman Catholic Church, which he calls "a disgusting institution" and "the second most evil religion in the world."

What, then, would be the most evil religion? Islam, we presume?

In a November 2012 speech, Dawkins referred to Islam as "one of the great evils of the world," although it appears this was not widely reported. But his recent tweets combatting Islamic claims to scientific prowess have sparked a firestorm of

controversy. Dawkins tweeted to his 777,000 Twitter followers at the time, "All the world's Muslims have fewer Nobel Prizes than Trinity College, Cambridge. They did great things in the Middle Ages, though."

In response to a flood of hostile tweets, Dawkins replied, "Why mention Muslim Nobels rather than any other group? Because we so often hear boasts about (a) their total numbers and (b) their science."

And, "You can attack someone for his opinion. But for simply stating an intriguing fact? Who would guess that a single Cambridge College . . ."

Ah, yes, but the mild criticism is against Muslims, in comparison with his scathing criticisms of Christians.

As noted on , "**Richard Dawkins** can criticize Christianity all he wants, but when he dares simply to note an 'intriguing fact' about Muslims and Islam, he incurs the wrath of the gods of political correctness. This controversy illustrates yet again that it doesn't matter who you are or what you have done or accomplished: if you stand against jihad violence and Islamic supremacism, or criticize Islam in any way, you will be targeted, vilified, smeared, and defamed, and every attempt will be made to destroy you."

Put another way, bashing Christians is commendable; criticizing Muslims is contemptible. Let's see where Dawkins goes from here.

Michael Brown is author of *The Real Kosher Jesus* and host of the nationally syndicated talk radio show *The Line of Fire* on the Salem Radio Network. He is also president of FIRE School of Ministry and director of the Coalition of Conscience. Follow him at AskDrBrown on Facebook or @drmichaellbrown on Twitter.

Partisan Fighting Spells Trouble for Church Insurance in Obamacare Age

An effort to tweak President Obama's **health care reform** bill to fill a gap for church health insurance plans could fail because of Republicans' insistence on repealing the law.

Without a fix, United Methodist Church leaders say some of their churches could drop current coverage for employees once "Obamacare" takes full effect next year, according to Colette Nies, spokeswoman for the UMC's General Board of Pension and Health Benefits.

Under Obama's 2010 Affordable Care Act, more than 50 percent of UMC clergy would qualify for tax credits available to lower- and middle-class families to purchase insurance. But because of the way the law was written, those tax credits cannot be used toward insurance plans churches can offer through government-run exchanges.

"The concern is that the church plans won't be viable if everyone who can get a tax credit leaves and goes to the state exchange," said Timothy Jost, a professor at Washington and Lee School of Law, who studies health care.

Since many churches are small—with one pastor and a few lay employees—they will not be required under the Obama plan to provide coverage. If a church drops coverage, that would free (or force) employees to seek the lower-cost insurance with the government exchange.

Small churches that fall outside the large-employer mandate

may conclude that they should drop health coverage and guide employees to purchase insurance on their own through government-run exchanges, where subsidies would apply, Nies said. Leaders of church-run health plans believe it would disadvantage church employees who have more tailored coverage.

“We cannot estimate how widespread this would be, but given the income demographics of the UMC workforce, it could be substantial,” Nies said.

UMC leaders praised the passage of the 2010 Affordable Care Act because it aligned with the denomination’s values. But leaders say churches were overlooked in the fine print.

Before the **health care law** was passed, denominations like the United Methodist Church may not have understood all of the implications of the health care law, said John Lomperis of the Washington-based Institute on Religion and Democracy, a conservative think tank that’s often critical of mainline Protestant churches.

“It is not even clear that they even took the time to carefully read the health care bill before so energetically endorsing it and lobbying for its passage,” he said.

A bill under consideration would assure that employees insured under church plans could use the same tax credits offered to people on government exchanges. In June, Democratic Senators Mark Pryor (Ark.) and Chris Coons (Del.) introduced the Church Health Plan Act of 2013 aimed at allowing church employees to apply for tax credits. More than 1 million pastors and other church employees could be impacted by the change, the senators argue.

“At this moment, we’re not expecting to get a vote,” said Ian Koski, a spokesman for Coons. “The dedication of Senate and House members to repeal it entirely instead of working with us to fix it has disincentivized Republicans from working with us on it.”

Koski also suggested that Republicans might have another incentive to block the legislation: Pryor is running for reelection as a Democrat in a decidedly red state.

The bill has received support of many denominations, including the Southern Baptist Convention, despite its leaders' push to repeal the entire act. Leaders within SBC's medical plan provider GuideStone say church health plans will be at a disadvantage in the health care marketplace.

"We don't think passing this legislation has to be inconsistent with those who hope for eventual repeal," said Rodney Miller, general counsel at GuideStone. "We're dealing with a law that's on the books in the here and now."

Even with widespread support across aisles, supporters assume the bill will die. House Republicans have already voted 40 times to repeal Obamacare.

Many religious groups have objected to the **health care law**, but much of the controversy has focused on the mandate that will require some religious organizations to provide contraception coverage at no cost to employees.

How Israel Can Help Feed the World

Innovative Israeli agriculture scientists, high tech experts and "startup nation" entrepreneurs have fused their knowledge and experience to develop new cutting-edge agricultural technologies. These innovations are poised to transform the global agricultural landscape and address urgent needs, and they represent a breakout investment opportunity.

According to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization, food production worldwide must increase 70 percent by 2050. Israeli agricultural know-how, developed to cope with local arid agricultural challenges and a fast-growing population, has become globally relevant at a time of increasing food shortages, climate change, declining agricultural yields, global population growth and changing dietary habits.

Increasing demand for high-quality, nutritious food and diminishing productivity growth, especially in high- and middle-income countries such as the United States and China, have created compelling business opportunities in agritech. Israel has new solutions to manage these issues that are ready for commercialization and adoption.

"Israeli agritechology can dramatically increase food yields in a sustainable, cost-effective way at a time when needs are currently unmet and growing," says Nitza Kardish, Ph.D., CEO of the Israel-based Mofet Venture Accelerator. "More than 200 R&D centers in Israel with a focus on agriculture and a government commitment to supporting innovation have fueled a growth in cutting-edge agritech startups."

Steve Rhodes, chairman of the Mofet Venture Accelerator, owned by Trendlines, says Israel has been compelled to develop a high-tech culture in recent decades due to its limited natural resources.

"The country is a popular target for global venture capital funds seeking to capitalize on Israel's entrepreneurial spirit as well as expertise honed in universities, research centers and on-the-ground initiatives," he says.

Examples of innovative Israeli agritech includes advanced precision farming techniques, water optimization, robotics and sensor-driven technology, environmentally friendly agrochemicals for crop protection and agribiotechnology.

In early December, investors and agritech professionals from across the globe will take part in a unique Agritech Tour in Israel, during which participants will experience firsthand how Israel has become a world-class agriculture technology leader and learn what the future of agritech holds.

The tour coincides with the second annual Agrivest conference. The conference will bring together local and international agritech investors, multinational corporate executives, Israeli government officials, scientists, business leaders and young startups to explore the opportunities, challenges and solutions facing the agritech/agriculture investment community at this critical time.

For more information, visit [.](#)

Women, You Are Called ‘For Such a Time as This’

I love the Old Testament account of Queen Esther, a beautiful young Jewish woman who put her life on the line to serve God and save her people.

Esther had been orphaned as a child and raised by her cousin Mordecai. She was elevated from a life of relative obscurity—via rather unique circumstances—to sit atop the throne of the Persian Empire. King Xerxes chose her from many as his queen following a royal bridal contest. He was unaware Esther and Mordecai were Jewish. It is unlikely he would have chosen Esther had he known. Mordecai was then appointed to a low-level government position.

After Mordecai unearthed a conspiracy to assassinate King

Xerxes, he quickly advised Esther. She, in turn, warned the king, giving full credit for the discovery to Mordecai, who was richly rewarded for his loyalty.

Meanwhile, Haman, Xerxes' highest-ranking executive—an evil man who hated the Jews—devised a plot to have all the Jewish people killed, including Esther and Mordecai. King Xerxes agreed to the genocidal scheme, still oblivious to Esther's Jewish heritage.

Once again, Mordecai learned of the conspiracy and urged Esther to reveal her Jewish heritage to Xerxes, saying, “For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14, NIV).

Esther called the Jewish people to **fasting** and **prayer** and—at risk to her own life and limb—devised a clever scheme of her own. She held a banquet for Xerxes and Haman wherein she revealed her Jewish heritage to the king and begged his mercy for herself and the Jewish people.

Xerxes was moved by Esther's courage and love for her people. He granted her request and became enraged at Haman. He had Haman executed and promoted Mordecai to his post. Xerxes then pledged safety for the Jewish people.

To this day, Esther's bravery, her **faith** in God and God's **deliverance** of His chosen people are celebrated during the Jewish festival of Purim.

The Bible is rich with stories of brave women who were called to serve God and country. These stories, like Esther's, are an inspiration to men, women and children alike. Still, such stories—such callings—are not exclusive to biblical times.

Women, you too—every one of you who both love the Lord and

wish to serve Him—are called “for such a time as this.”

At Liberty Counsel, we often hear from women who are deeply concerned about our nation’s self-destructive trajectory. The burning question they ask is “What can I do?” Like us, they wish to preserve our nation’s Judeo-Christian heritage and secure the legacy we are leaving for future generations.

In response, Liberty Counsel and Women Impacting the Nation (WIN) offer an exceptional opportunity to answer the call. Women young and old can learn from—and be inspired by—other women who are changing their communities, their states and the nation at the third annual “For Such a Time as This” conference in Orlando, Fla., on Nov. 15-16.

This is a unique conference that blends faith with action, bringing informative speakers with time for fun, fellowship, prayer, praise and **worship**.

There will be renowned speakers, such as AP award-winning investigative journalist Jan Morgan, who will share from her expertise as an NRA-certified firearms instructor.

There will also be opportunities to enjoy a concert with Dove Award-winner Kathy Troccoli; to have dinner with author and CURE founder **Star Parker**; to shop a fantastic silent auction; to attend a reception with Liberty Counsel President **Anita Staver** and other speakers; to hear from Campus Crusade co-founder **Vonette Bright**; to meet talk show host Rachel Campos-Duffy; to learn from Susan Michael, director of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem; and much more.

WIN founder **Sue Trombino** underscores why your **faith** and action are needed now more than ever.

“Our nation is in imminent danger of self-destruction at the hands of its own undereducated, misinformed, disconnected citizens,” she warns. “Our enemies around the globe are diligently working to exploit our ignorance and tolerance to

bring the United States of America to its knees. It is time for God's people to take a stand and do something. But to be effective, we must first understand what it is we believe, why we believe it and what we can do about protecting our faith and our rights."

Indeed, as goes the old adage, "Knowledge is power."

I want to personally thank all of you who take the time to read my weekly column. I also want to strongly encourage you ladies to **prayerfully** consider attending this conference and to enlist your friends and family members to join you—to join this esteemed lineup of modern-day Esthers.

Come learn about the issues and ideas that really matter to you in a fun, encouraging and relaxing setting. Come and be empowered to help reverse this nation's "progressive" careen toward a secular-socialist cliff's edge. You will go home encouraged, informed, emboldened and equipped with the truth that you need to make a positive impact in your own sphere of influence and community.

Register now for this one-of-a-kind conference at or , or call 877-671-1776.

Together, women of faith can help secure our nation for future generations—because each of you were called "for such a time as this."

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Pentecostal Fire Still Driving Assemblies of God Growth

If you read the new issue of *Charisma*, you know that some good things are happening in the Assemblies of God under the leadership of George O. Wood. If you didn't read the article, [click here](#).

Last week, the General Council of the Assemblies of God, held every two years, took place in my hometown. I've attended sporadically over the years because I grew up in the Assemblies of God. (I was born in its headquarters city of Springfield, Mo.). Both my father and my wife's father were ordained Assemblies of God ministers. My maternal grandmother and grandfather were ordained in the Assemblies of God in 1914 and 1919, respectively.

Wood gave an especially stirring speech during the General Council, which you can watch [here](#).

A Jewish writer representing the Religion News Service called me last week to ask why the Assemblies is growing even (if only by a few percentage points) when most of the other denominations are declining. There are many reasons, and while I have my opinions, I'm sure that I don't fully grasp why that is. This year, I saw a vibrancy that indicates an excitement that translates into growth. There were many young people in attendance and more ethnic minorities than I can ever remember seeing before. In fact, most of growth in the Assemblies of God is actually coming in the ethnic community or in older churches that appeal to them.

I told the reporter that there is entrepreneurial spirit in the Assemblies that goes back to its early days. Pioneer leaders had vision. They planted churches and established

Bible institutes—many of which have evolved into respected universities. They sent missionaries all over the world.

Today, the Assemblies has one of the largest missions organizations in the world, and it has grown worldwide to be the largest Protestant denomination, with 65 million members. This is an increase of about a million over the previous year. Consider these statistics:

- There is one new believer every 25 seconds in an Assemblies of God congregation.
- One new AG church is planted every 39 minutes.
- By 2012, the Assemblies of God had planted 362,791 churches throughout the world.
- There are currently Assemblies of God churches in 252 countries and territories.
- Worldwide, there are total of 377,000 Assemblies of God ministers.
- There are 2,708 world missionaries and associates.
- Over \$200 million was given to Assemblies of God World Missions in 2012.

Here are some statistics in the United States:

- There were 23 years of consecutive adherent growth in the denomination from 1989 to 2012.
- There are now more than 3 million adherents in the United States, including 56,000 new adherents—an increase of 1.8 percent from 2011.
- Forty percent of the adherents in the Assemblies of God are under 25 years old.
- Forty-one percent of adherents in the Assemblies of God are non-white.
- There are a total of 7,815 women who hold ministerial credentials or ordination with the Assemblies of God.
- There are 21 ethnic language fellowships in the denomination.
- There are 2,463 United States missionaries and

associates (including interns in the United States) in the denomination.

But while all these statistics are important, the real statistics are the ones that show the number of lives that are changed:

- In the last five years, there have been 1,597 new AG churches established in the United States.
- There were 453,500 conversions in the AG in the last 12 months.
- There were 131,713 people baptized in water in the denomination.
- There were 81,345 who reported receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit and the belief that the power of the Spirit is for today caused the Assemblies of God to start in 1914—only eight years after the Pentecostal revival broke out at Azusa Street in Los Angeles. From talking to leaders, experiencing the services and my firsthand knowledge, I believe this Pentecostal fire is still important and fueling the growth.

Sure, there are many problems with the Assemblies, including how to cope with worldliness that inevitably creeps into the church as well as a drift toward liberalism, modernism, complacency and denominational bureaucratic lethargy. But there is still a desire and a fervor for that Pentecostal power and a desire to reach the world that seems to embody what is happening in the Assemblies of God in 2013.

For the last 38 years, *Charisma* and its many offshoots have been serving the wider body of Christ. But my family is AG. And most readers know that *Charisma* started at Calvary Assembly in Orlando.

After attending General Council, I praise God for the progress cited here. I was encouraged by what I saw and experienced at

General Council, and I thank God for leaders such as George O. Wood and many others who are moving boldly ahead during uncertain times.

Steve Strang is the founder and publisher of Charisma. Follow him on Twitter @sstrang or Facebook (stephenestrang).

How the Assemblies of God Is Defying Denominational Decline

The **Assemblies of God**, a denomination rooted in rural and small town America, appears to have leaped into the 21st century with dramatic results.

At its General Council meeting Aug. 5-9, the denomination touted its formula for defying the seemingly irreversible decline of other religious groups: contemporary music, arts and high-tech quality communication, outreach to young people, immigrants and ethnic minorities.

The denomination reported a 1.8 percent increase in U.S. membership to 3 million adherents. Globally, the gain was 1.5 percent, to 66 million, making it the largest **Pentecostal** group in the world.

Why are the **Assemblies of God** defying the odds?

“We have been flexible when it comes to culture—music, dress, pulpit attire—while remaining consistent on that which has not changed, which is doctrine,” said **George O. Wood**, the newly re-elected general superintendent who is also chairman of the World Assemblies of God.

Wood, 71, an attorney as well as a minister, said other denominations have “shifted in their doctrinal focus, and softened their reliance on the authority of God’s Word, especially as it relates to Scripture and sexuality morality.”

For example, the denomination’s boys’ youth group, the Royal Rangers, appears to have benefited from the **Boy Scouts of America’s** recent decision to admit gay scouts.

“Since the May 23 BSA decision, Royal Rangers has received many inquiries from families, churches, and denominations seeking an alternate way to mentor future men,” said Doug Marsh, national Royal Rangers director. “We have helped dozens of troops make the transition or take steps for a forthcoming change.”

The denomination steadfastly opposes **gay marriage** and ordination.

Among the 26,000 delegates and visitors thronging the cavernous halls of the Orange County Convention Center for the biennial meeting, which ended Friday, there is still a smattering of older white people and women in modest, ankle-length skirts and sensible black shoes.

But they are almost lost among the young, especially people of color. Fully 40 percent here are under 25, according to the gathering’s organizers, many of them immigrants or children of immigrants, and minorities.

Efraim Espinoza, director of the denomination’s Office of Hispanic Relations, credited the denomination’s intentional focus on Spanish-language resources and emphasis on community leaders tasked with nurturing local Hispanic congregations.

The Assemblies dates back to a 1914 gathering called “the **Azusa Street Revival**” in Los Angeles, a series of interracial services that featured what would become the essential elements of Pentecostalism, including **speaking in tongues**

(glossolalia), **faith healing**, **prophecy** and a practice called “slain in the spirit,” in which a person falls to the ground as a result of a **Holy Spirit** encounter. In the early decades, few of its preachers were seminary trained.

Today, the **Assemblies of God** congregations range from urban storefronts to suburban **megachurches**. And although its theology is proudly conservative—some would say fundamentalist—the denomination’s history has given it some key advantages.

In addition to being racially integrated from its inception—as a Fuller Theological Seminary student in the 1960s, Wood marched for **civil rights**—the Assemblies has always ordained women. In some areas, according to *Charisma* magazine, 60 percent of new pastors are women.

The denomination was an early adapter of contemporary, and then electronic music.

However, some change can be disquieting. In the past year, the denomination reports that traditional “water baptisms” have nearly doubled while “spirit baptisms,” involving **speaking in tongues**, declined. Some have wondered whether this was a product of unfamiliarity with the tradition among immigrant members.

But Wood, son of a China missionary, attributes this to yet another cultural shift—the eclipse of regular Sunday evening services, where such conversions often took place. He said he thought that thousands of unrecorded “spirit baptisms” have taken place at summer camps for young people.

In the last few years, the denomination has recruited veterans of the Relevant Media Group in Orlando to help develop a **Pentecostal** voice for new media.

Significantly, the team is based in Nashville, Tenn., rather than at the denomination’s headquarters in Springfield, Mo.

Their instrument of choice is the iPad.

“Historically the **Assemblies of God** has always been entrepreneurial,” said Steve Strang, the son of two Assemblies of God pastors, as well as the founder and CEO of Charisma Media, a book and magazine publisher based in Lake Mary, Fla.

“They’ve always hustled,” he said. “When entrepreneurs look and see that things are not growing, they make a judgment and adapt, and that’s what’s happening.”

3 Things You Must Activate in Your Life

Ever wonder what’s most important to God when it comes to your character? The following are very critical to your character development.

1. Your Thoughts

“As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.” –Solomon

The battlefield is in your mind. Your thoughts are powerful. In fact, God can do nothing in you beyond your belief system. Everything is possible for the man who believes.

We often establish fences that keep us out of areas of the unknown. For example, science in the past said that man was incapable of breaking the 4-minute mile. That was until May 6, 1954, when Roger Bannister ran a mile in 3 minutes, 59.4 seconds. Today, thousands run under the 4-minute barrier. One man broke the barrier of a universally held belief system.

Two very important questions that you should consider:

- What are you doing today that you once thought was impossible?
- What are you not doing today because you think it is impossible?

2. Your Words

“From the fruit of his lips a man enjoys good things.”
–Solomon

Men love to talk about the things they are passionate about. Yet very few men understand the gravity of their words. Your words have power. Your words reveal your secrets. If you don't understand this powerful truth, consider the impact of the words that you speak to your wife and children. Your words literally mold them into what you say over them.

Two very important questions that you should consider:

- What words do I exclude from my vocabulary?
- What words will I include in my vocabulary?

3. Your Relationships

“The man who walks with wise men becomes wise himself.”
–Solomon

Relationships are about proximity. You should know who is in your “success zone.” What books are you currently reading? What television shows are you entertained by? What conversations are you involved in? What jokes do you listen to?

I'm a private person, yet I have very transparent conversations. Those with whom I dialogue know that I am very open to discuss matters but that I am also very selective in what I will say. I've learned that proximity governs most of my life.

I was speaking with a man concerning the unfaithfulness of a

mutual friend. I said, "I don't understand how a man allows the proximity of a woman to enter his life for him to cross the line for adultery." Somehow, the man opened his life for the relationship.

Two very important questions that you should consider:

- Who is currently in my life that I should avoid?
- Who is not in my life that I should invite?

***FivestarMan** was founded in 2008 by **Neil Kennedy**. Kennedy has passionately promoted God's Word for 25-plus years of ministry. He is known for practically applying biblical principles that elevate people to a new level of living. As a business, church, ministry and life consultant, Kennedy has helped others strategize the necessary steps to reach their full potential.*

For the original article, visit .

The Pitfalls of a Spiritual Experience

As you pursue supernatural encounters with God, beware of the dangers of the invisible realm. Some advice from Patricia King.

Are there dangers in the school of spiritual experience? Yes! If a person lives outside the perimeters of the Word, way or will of God in any area of his life, danger lurks.

Likewise, in your natural life, there are things that could be dangerous if you do not abide by proper principles. For example, driving a car can be hazardous if you do not abide by

the laws of the road.

But if you read the owner's manual, abide by the rules, exercise caution and watch out for the other guy, you will most likely maintain a safe and successful driving record. Meanwhile, the inherent dangers of driving should not deter you from getting into your vehicle.

Here some examples of dangers that one should be aware of before getting in the "driver's seat" of spiritual experience.

Witchcraft and Occultism

Any activity or manipulation of the spirit realm not under the rule of Christ is called witchcraft. This practice is forbidden in Scripture.

Be careful of "guided imagery," a practice in which someone else tells you what to see. This can lead to manipulation (see Deut. 18:10-14; Gal. 5:17-25). The Holy Spirit is the only one who can lead you into divine encounters.

If you have had previous experience with New Age, false religions, or the occult, you will need to fully renounce those practices along with any spirit guides or spiritual counselors who taught you. This is very important. You need to be cleansed from all that is false and submit to all that is true.

Idolatry and Unhealthy Fascination

Our primary passion must always be for the Lord Himself, and we must always place Him at the center of our affections. All spiritual experience needs to draw the heart and affections of the believer to deepened relationship with Christ.

Experience Orientation

Although God desires for us to experience Him and His kingdom to build relationship, when believers focus on only spiritual

experiences, it can cause great problems with both their walk and their character. They can begin to believe that their spiritual encounters are endorsements of their character and maturity.

This is not the case. Love, worship of Christ, and faith and obedience to the Word of God are the hallmarks of authentic Christian living.

Pride and Self-Exaltation

No one is beyond being tempted by pride. Lucifer himself, even though he was a high-ranking angel in heaven, fell into the sin of pride. That sin cost him his place in heaven, and he was cast out!

The apostle Paul was aware that he was susceptible to pride because of the “abundance of revelations” he received (see 2 Cor. 12:7). If these Bible figures could be in danger, it is vital that we also guard against pride.

Error and Deception

Entering into spiritual experience without a proper and complete foundation in the Word of God can sometimes open the door to error and deception. Good solid Bible teaching should always accompany spiritual experience.

If you see a vision or enjoy an encounter in the “glory realm,” then study it out in the Word of God afterward. Always let the Word of God be the first testing place to validate experience.

It is also important to have a good accountability circle around you and some mature Christians who can help mentor and pastor you into maturity. In the multitude of counselors there is wisdom.

Patricia King is a Canadian author who bases her ministry, Extreme Prophetic, in Maricopa, Arizona. Log on to her Web site at .

Michael W. Smith's Label Change 'Wasn't a Rash Decision'

Christian music veteran Michael W. Smith has signed with a new label for the first time in his 30-year career. Smith recently inked a deal with Capitol Christian Music Group (CCMG), leaving Provident Music Group.

"When you've been with a family as long as I've been with Provident, it's very difficult to leave, so I don't take it lightly and it wasn't a rash decision," Smith told *Billboard* magazine. "[Provident Music Group President/CEO] Terry Hemmings is still one of my best friends, but I think every once in a while—especially if you've been doing it as long as I have—sometimes it's good to have a different set of ears just to have another shot at it."

Smith started his career writing songs for Amy Grant, Bill Gaither and Sandi Patty before releasing his GRAMMY-nominated debut album, *The Michael W. Smith Project*, in 1983 with Reunion Records, which became part of Provident Music Group, Sony's Christian division.

Smith has placed 29 albums on *Billboard's* Top Christian Albums chart, including 13 No. 1 titles and 25 in the top 10.

Smith's new record deal began with a publishing agreement.

"We began talking to Michael several months ago about working with him as a songwriter," CCMG President/CEO Bill Hearn told *Billboard*. "Since that time, we developed a publishing relationship with Michael where we are administrating his back catalog of songs, and we've done a new co-publishing deal going forward with him for future songs."

Smith has spent the last two years touring extensively abroad, and his first CCMG album is planned to be a live recording of worship songs recorded in Brazil, Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka and other countries.