

A matter of *Obedience*

By Glynisia Yeo

Harvest Times takes an intimate look at the life of Sy Rogers. His extraordinary God-ignited transformation and his life story has become the motivation for change in the lives of thousands.

"My greatest testimony about God is not that He saved me from sexual sin; it's not that He's given me cool opportunities in life to serve Him. My greatest testimony is that God has been nice to me, that He's been kind to me, that He treats me better than I deserve. I'm overwhelmed by how gracious He's been to me."

Sy Rogers

When you meet Sy Rogers in person, you find yourself confronted by a man whose mannerisms often belie his true identity in Christ. You may possibly feel awkward at first, but as you hear his story and the journey of how he found Christ, you will be amazed, not just by what he says, but *how* he says it all—his complete honesty and sincere appreciation of all that God has done in His life. Beneath the external lies a heart of true obedience and deep devotion to his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Raised in a nominally Christian family where everything seemed alright on the outside, Sy's parents were in actual fact battling with his mother's alcoholism. In the midst of it all, Sy experienced a terrible encounter that left him emotionally crippled for much of his life—over a period of time, he was abused sexually by a trusted family "friend." Then, as if to strike the final debilitating blow, Sy lost his mother in a drunk-driving accident. Not knowing any better, his grief-stricken father sent him away for a year so that he could recover from the demise of his wife and re-establish his life.

Feeling abandoned at the most fragile period of his life, Sy's security and identity as a male was left unaffirmed and un nourished. Being away from his father, who was

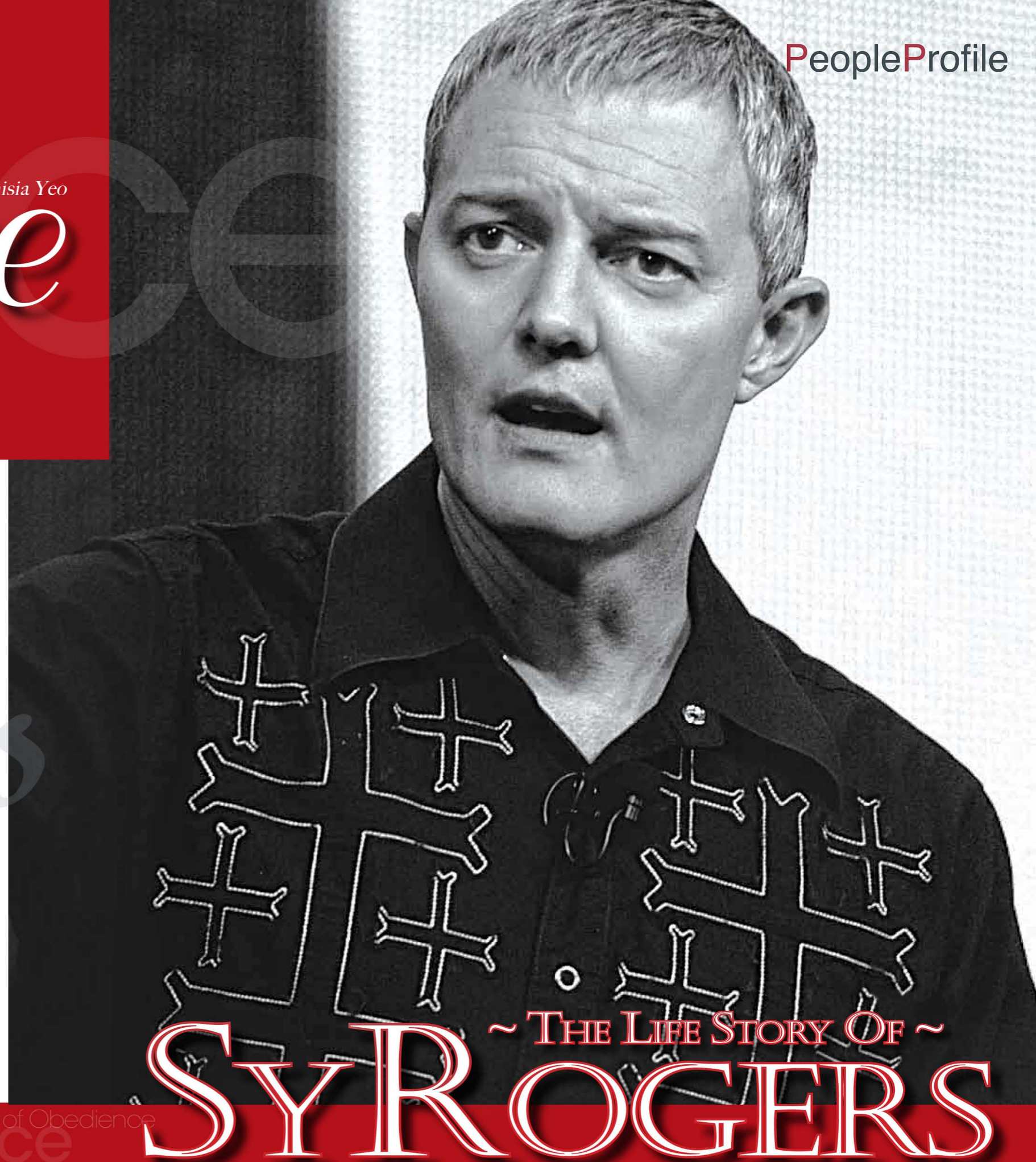
the only male model in his life then, and being raised in a predominantly female environment, he began to develop effeminate mannerisms. Though Sy went back to live with his father, things were never the same. Sy could not help but to keep a distance because he vowed never to be hurt by him again.

In school, Sy was ruthlessly taunted and ridiculed by the other boys. He was labeled a "sissy," "homosexual" and a "failure as a man." In effect, the relentless teasing actually led him to believe and conform to his given identity as a homosexual although he had not even begun to be sexually active at that time.

SY'S DAMASCUS ROAD ENCOUNTER

Things did not improve when he entered college. In fact, life only got worse. On campus, Sy was openly gay, and highly prominent. Often, it resulted in ugly displays of prejudice—he was denied a room mate and some students even signed a petition in an attempt to get him kicked out of school. However, the lack of acceptance that he faced only succeeded in spurring him on his ways stubbornly.

All this time, even though Sy knew about God, he never once thought about the significance of having a



~ THE LIFE STORY OF ~
SY ROGERS

relationship with God. He shares, “While I was not ignorant about church or about the reality of God or Jesus, I believed God hated people like me. So I felt trapped and separated from Him. I was just trying to make the best of my life.” Without God, he



fully surrendered himself to his effeminate identity, dressing as a woman and fooling many around him. His life thus deteriorated into a downward spiral that brought him to the brink of a permanent sex-change operation. It was then that God intervened.

Sy relates dramatically, “It was as if God finally said one day, ‘Enough!’ and intervened in my life.”

That was back in 1979. On a typical day, Sy was going through his routine New Age meditating exercise when the presence of God just descended upon him in the room. For the first time in his life, Sy experienced the tangible presence of God.

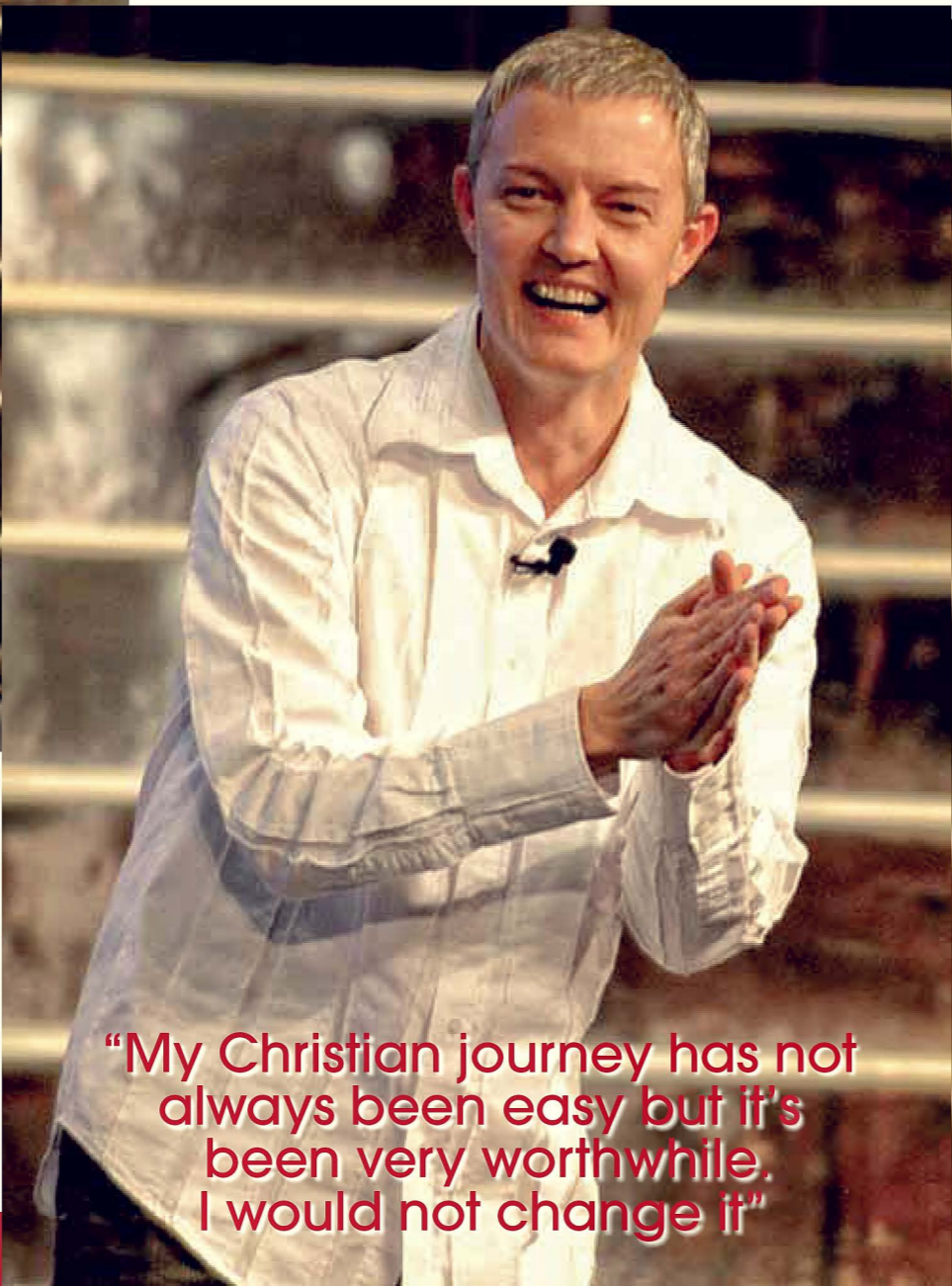
He recalls, “My eyes were opened to God’s

reality and He ceased to be something I just knew about ... He became a real-life tangible presence. And I wanted Him ... more than my lifestyle and more than my lover. I wanted God. And because He became real to me, it was extremely motivating for me.”

TAKING THE FIRST STEP

As Sy began his new walk with God, he still had many unanswered questions and many different struggles. What sustained him was the knowing in his heart that God was helping him; that God was with him and he could run to God knowing He would help him.

Walking the new life wasn’t always a smooth one. “If I fell down, God would encourage me to get up and try again. Like a baby learning



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to walk, I hadn’t found my balance yet but God did not rebuke me. He would encourage me to get up and keep walking with Him. And one day, I found my balance. And a whole new world of freedom opened up for me.”

But this sudden change was not entirely easy to swallow for those around him.

“My gay friends thought that I was crazy,” Sy recounts. On one side of the camp, his friends mocked him saying, “You’re crazy. It won’t last! It won’t work!”

On the other end of the spectrum, “Christians also looked at me like I was a freak,” he remembers.

“And I wondered too, you know, is this worth it? Can I do this? But I began to not worry so much about ten days from now or ten years from now ... I just thought, ‘My eyes had been opened to God, there’s a lot I don’t know but this much I do know: He’s real and somehow, my life matters to Him.’ Like King David said centuries ago, ‘You made the entire universe, God. And who am I that I matter to You?’ But I do [matter to God]—and I found that compelling.”

“I had to crucify my inner desires, sometimes daily, and it wasn’t pleasant ... I [still] had those feelings and desires. But God was real enough to me and this became even more motivating than all the doubts, all the fears, all the questions and all the sacrifices. It’s like the [parable of the] pearl of great price. I traded all of these other things to have the one thing that at last I had caught a

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glimpse of ... I don’t know if anything less would have worked for me. I had to have God intervene [in my life].”

In his personal testimony, Sy attributes his steadfastness in his newfound faith to the unconditional love of God. His first taste of God showed him how desperately he needed God to love him, and that produced a deeper hunger for more of God and to walk faithfully with Him daily.

SMALL BEGINNINGS

At that time, Sy was very much an inexperienced young person in his 20s and didn’t know much about the calling of God in his life. He had just finished a stint in the navy and was trying to find work. So while trying to find a regular job, he decided to volunteer actively at a Christian ministry.

“[My attitude was] ‘I’m here, I’ll do whatever you like.’ So I began serving as a janitor, and then a file clerk. But what seemed like a very humble beginning was an opportunity to be faithful. I didn’t have an idea that I would one day become a global speaker, teacher or any of the other things ... everything leads to something else and I had many lessons to learn.

“Each season of service is important and foundational and preparatory toward the day that my ministry would be larger and more influential. It wasn’t an obvious, specific call. The first real

specific call that I got was to come to Singapore and the Lord gave me that message in 1984. But it took me seven more years before I fulfilled it.

“Just because God called, it didn’t mean it’s going to happen overnight. I had many other lessons to learn first so that when the door opened for my relocation, I now had something to offer.”

OPEN DOORS

After his conversion, Sy moved down from the state of Maryland in Washington D.C. to Florida. There, he became the director of a counseling service and then became the president of a network of counseling services. He also developed television and radio programs gaining recognition in his field, especially as a communicator and teacher. All of that led to the open door for him to come to Singapore.

To date, Sy has traveled to six continents many times during his 25

years in full-time ministry. In 2004 alone, Sy’s international travel crossed the 140,000 mile mark, including his many trips within the United States itself.

Still, despite his very hectic schedule, Sy never fails to find time for his highest priorities—his personal relationship with God, and his wife and daughter. To determine what he focuses his time and efforts on, Sy shares, “I have to be very careful that I don’t get involved in too many projects or I’ll get spread too thin. So I have to stay pretty focused on things that matter the most.” And that includes making choices that would most affect people for God’s purposes.

FAMILY MATTERS

Sy met his wife, Karen while serving in the ministry more than two decades ago. Their friendship became

the foundation for trust and mutual respect to take place. Through time, Karen began to feel that she could trust and respect him despite his turbulent past. Sy was attracted to her tremendous commitment to God, which he describes vividly as “a depth that said, *God is my Source. There will never be anyone else that can take His place.*”

Sy acknowledges, “I found that amazing because I was always looking with the idea in mind that if I can find the right lover, the right friend, the right one ... all my needs will be met.

“Karen taught me that mistakenly bowing down to another human is like making them ‘god’ ... but humans don’t exist as your source. Humans come and go—they fail us—but God is the truest Source, and when we feed off God, we don’t have to cling to others.”

Through time, Sy won her trust and respect, and she readily accepted his sincere proposal. They have been married for 22 years now and have a 19-year-old daughter. Together, this close-knit family shares a bond that places Jesus at the helm of their family life.

“Family is a husband and wife, loving each other, staying committed to that marriage and raising and nurturing the next generation. It’s very important that this is protected. I’ve had to learn to love my family really deliberately because I know what it’s like to have success in a field and to run that race very hard and be good at it, but miss the race that really matters.

“God is not going to hold me accountable for not working harder; He will hold me accountable for how I raise my family.”

ALL ABOUT GOD

As Sy continues to travel the globe and touch hundreds and thousands of people, one thing that he always talks to people about is the character of God—His wonderful, hopeful, redeeming character.

“God understands our fallen nature; He understands its corruption ... to the degree that He paid the ultimate price in order to redeem the situation. God is very enduring with the handicap of sin in our lives. Even though sin is no longer my master, I still have a fallen nature. The fact that God is so patient with me and helps me, corrects me, teaches me, comforts me, guides me, I just find it a remarkable testimony to His character.

“Though I’ve never relapsed back into homosexuality, I’ve had setbacks, I’ve made mistakes, I have humiliated myself, I have thought of quitting, I have probably gone through the whole gamut of emotions that we think about in our darker moments. And in spite of it all, I still can’t get off the hook that God is real, involved in my life and somehow, some day, this will turn around and I’m going to keep on persevering until I get there.”

As a testament to God’s goodness in his life, Sy affirms, “My conversion experience and my life after that was really not about being no longer a homosexual ... it’s always about surrendering completely to God. It’s not about trying to be ‘straight’ ... the real goal was submission to God; putting Him first.” He also adds purposefully, “My Christian journey has not always been easy but it’s been very worthwhile. I would not change it.”

It is, after all, a matter of obedience. **HT**

[For more information about Sy Rogers, his ministry, music, and teaching products, visit www.syrogers.com or visit the Attributes Bookstore located at City Harvest Church at 1 Jurong West Street 91.]