



Lifting the Lid

Sy ministers with honesty and transparency

It's these hot potatoes that bring Sy to Australia several times a year to minister at Bible colleges, churches, seminars and women's events. On his most recent trip down under, Sy visited major cities and regional towns across the country.

And while he also travels extensively to other parts of the world, it's Australia that holds a special place in his heart. "There's a wonderful pragmatism about Aussies," says Sy. "They are not afraid to confront sexual concerns and for the most part, Aussies like it straight."

At the recent Hillsong *Sense and Sexuality* seminar, Sy spoke with an unnerving clarity about subjects many of us find uncomfortable. He's the guy who's not afraid to 'go there', giving it straight to the 3500 strong crowd. And when he finished speaking, there was no doubting the impact. I asked Sy if he was used to receiving standing ovations.

"I am so thankful when my messages are well received," says Sy. "I certainly don't take it for granted. I believe Christians universally appreciate the truth about the human condition, truth about God's redemptive character and appropriate transparency too."

While Sy says he's heard it all when it comes to the human condition, what saddens him the most is the breakdown of families and relationships. "People ultimately pay a high price," he maintains. "I do however try to maintain an optimistic perspective, believing that God wants to redeem the situation, despite the alarming nature of the problem."

According to 'Blazing Grace,' a website focusing on pornography, the issues are more alarming than most of us think. Surveys conducted over the past decade have revealed disturbing facts about the number of Christian men (including those in ministry) who have viewed pornography recently. And although it's difficult to obtain statistics here in Australia, Sy believes sexual misconduct is prevalent everywhere.

For Sy, these statistics come as no surprise. His response is not one of condemnation but of grace. "Three things come to mind," he explains. "First, Christians are still thoroughly human and that means vulnerable. Anointing and the calling on people's lives do not exempt leaders from this reality either. Secondly, we live in a pervasive media civilisation, with potent sexual material so widely available. It's hard not to look and be slimed, or drawn in . . . just turn the channel, turn the corner, turn on line and it's there. Thirdly, so many men in God's family already have sexualized histories prior to, or in spite of a Born Again experience. These reinforced patterns are difficult to retrain."

Sy recognises that often churches offer little or no informed discipleship to address the effects of pornography and fantasy, so these men don't get the encouragement and accountability to make the progress that they could.

"I believe Christians need a Theology of Sexuality," he declares. "By that, I mean a clear and comprehensive view that provides an understanding of God's intent for sexuality, how that has been misdirected and the role of the individual and church in seeing God's intent restored."

A gifted international communicator, award winning talk show host, recording artist and Pastor, Sy Rogers has served the church for three decades, touching on some of the most controversial issues affecting Christians today. Nicole Partridge reveals the man behind the message.

When Sy Rogers stands to speak, people listen. He talks fast, eloquently, hardly stopping to draw breath. He has a quick tongue and a sharp wit. With his slightly effeminate voice, expressive mannerisms and undeniable magnetism, he could be the guy who is going to redesign your home, not renovate your life.

At 50 years of age, Sy is regarded by many as one of the most gifted communicators of our time: He's been described as extraordinary, illuminating and insightful. In 1996, *Christianity Today* magazine selected Sy as one of the 'fifty up and coming Evangelical Leaders under 40.'

His message is deep, timely and often controversial. He openly addresses taboo subjects such as masturbation, pornography and homosexuality. He knows, because he's been there. He doesn't claim to have all the answers, but his past life and nearly three decades of ministry give him an authority to speak on issues that are often swept under the carpet.

on Sexuality in our Churches



Sy takes care, when addressing sexual issues, not to point the finger at those who are struggling. “I know what it is like,” he admits, “and what I discovered through my own journey is that there are solutions and people can be redeemed as they realise God’s love is bigger than our failures and our past.”

Sy’s own journey

Sy, whose unusual name is derived from ‘S’ in one family surname and ‘Y’ from another family surname, grew up in a small thriving town nestled in the Bible belt of America.

His childhood was far from idyllic. He was an only child. His father, now retired, was a professional photographer and his mother was a part time model and scholar. Her life took a tragic turn when she became an alcoholic and was killed at the age of 28 in a drink driving accident.

Still traumatised by the death of his mother and confused after an episode of sexual molestation that took place when he was a little boy, Sy went to live with relatives. It was this decision, made by his well-meaning father, that would reinforce his already growing feelings of rejection and abandonment.

School was also a difficult time for Sy. He says he was often the subject of taunting because of effeminate mannerisms picked up in his temporary home. At 17, Sy was introduced to the gay scene during a summer exchange to Brazil. Finding acceptance and perceived happiness in the gay community led the young Sy to embrace a gay identity.

After immersing himself in the gay lifestyle, he then entered a John Hopkins sex change program, which meant living and working as a woman, while taking female hormones. He never went through with the surgery; instead he had a dramatic encounter with God.

Before he could have that operation, the years of prayers by his family and friends, were miraculously answered. In a God inspired twist of fate, the hospital put a stop to gender re-assignment and then in 1979, Sy says he encountered God in a real and tangible way.

A short time later, Sy joined a church, eventually finding the meaningful relationships he had always craved. He said that he found cleansing and healing, growing in his understanding and love for God. The men in his church began to love him unconditionally, something Sy had yearned for. He now admits that it wasn’t sex he was after all those years, but love and acceptance and the need to feel valued. Soon after his conversion, Sy volunteered for an inner city ministry, which eventually led to his work in the area of sexual healing.

Three decades of ministry later, Sy Rogers is going strong. He now serves the body of Christ as an itinerant teacher, minister and consultant, still sharing his remarkable story.

“I am not going to live like my past never happened,” admits Sy, “and there have been struggles along the way, but I am pleased to be able to give my testimony as an encouragement to others.”

Sy is passionate about his calling, describing himself as a waiter, serving the bread that God has given him. His specialty is sexual themes, relationship issues and the character of God; and he’s serving this up to thousands at church events, men’s seminars, youth rallies, Bible colleges and missions’ conferences around the globe.

Although Sy has the ability to draw capacity crowds, he also recognises that success and notoriety are fleeting, fragile and risky and often lacking the whole view of a person. “I have a few gifts and a lot of weaknesses,” he concedes.

Maybe I’m seeing things differently, but from where I sit, Sy appears to have more gifts than most. He’s a speaker, pastor, counsellor, song writer and a musician—another string to his bow. What began as folk orientated music in church, led him to a recording career that has seen him write and perform his own unique blend of electronica or dance club music, with a strong gospel message. He has written more than 50 songs and has recorded on, or written for seven projects, including six albums—three of them his own.

Adding to his impressive resume is his 20 years in television

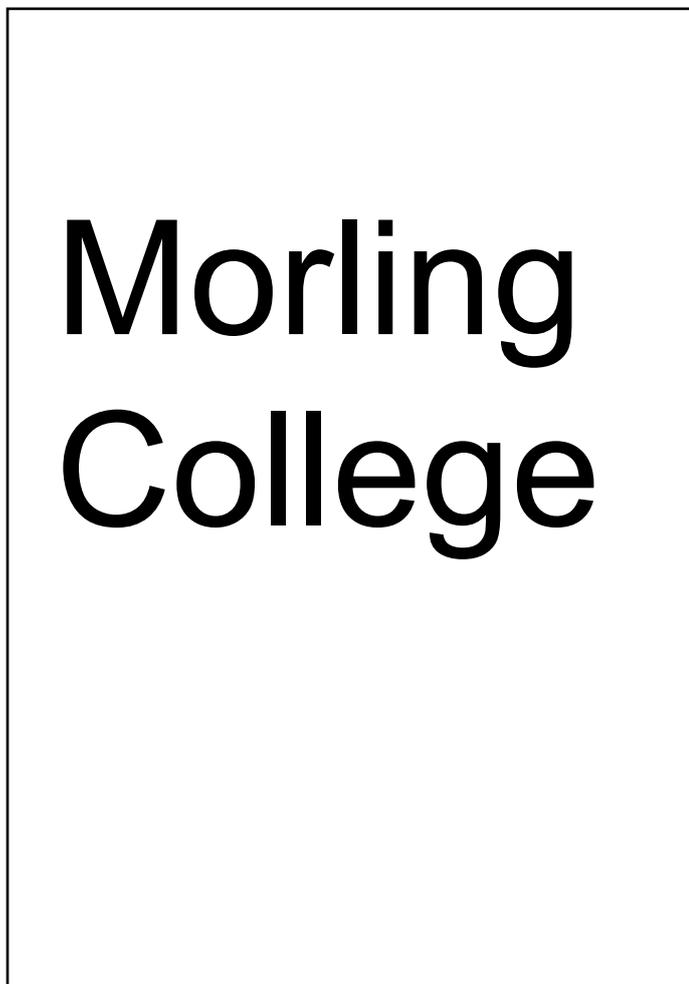
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and radio, which has won him numerous awards and opened doors in the most unlikely places. He tells me he will now spend more time writing. Yet for all his talents, Sy remains humble. "It's all about communication," he says. "There is a lot I don't know and can't do, but God has apparently equipped me as a communicator—a gifting that wasn't evident until I became a Christian."

God's redemption

Growing up, Sy says he was preoccupied with airplanes, maps and the travel section of the newspaper. Ironically, Sy now ministers to thousands of people in more than 48 cities across six continents. And when he's not on a plane, addressing a live audience, performing or recording; he's at home in Orlando, Florida with his wife Karen of 25 years. "My wife is my best intercessor, accountability partner and partner in ministry," he exclaims. Together they have travelled the world and have seen countless lives impacted through a ministry that is lifting the lid on sexuality.

I asked Sy if there was hope for anyone caught up in sexual sin. "The hope is God's great love and compassion and his ability to rescue and redeem us, right down to our sexuality," Sy maintains. "That is, if we are willing to surrender and stay submitted to him."



"Sexual transgression, regardless of its satisfaction or pleasure, is fraught with risks and consequences. That's why God is so serious about sexual standards."

Wearing his Pastor's hat, Sy switches gears, "If you have sinned sexually, remember, sexual sin is typical—who doesn't struggle with sexuality to some degree? This is not an excuse, but neither are you a rare case. Sexual sin is understandable. All of us want to be valued too, which is so often a motivation in having sex, even illicit sex," Sy explains.

"Additionally, sexual sin is forgivable and correctible. As I always say, God has a biblical and modern history of redeeming sexual sinners. Struggles and failures in this area need not chase us away from God, but rather, should push us to him. God offers not only forgiveness, but the grace and guidelines to correct course and learn responsible stewardship of sexuality.

"For many, if not most—learning to master the various aspects of sexuality takes time and effort, humility, accountability and a lot of determination. In that process, never give up on yourself or the God who will walk through the messy seasons with you, to achieve his best in your life. Depending on God and staying submitted to his process, has worked for me thus far."

With every question, Sy thinks deeply before answering in protracted sentences. His thoughts are complex, yet profound. He is a master of communication. But is this how he would like to be remembered? He pauses and then answers, "I want to be remembered as a person who loved God, remained loyal to God and encouraged others in their walk with God. We are on this journey together—and when we get to the other end, we'll realise, it was all worth it." ^(A)

Nicole Partridge
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For more information on Sy Rogers and his ministry, or how you can book Sy Rogers, go to www.syrogers.com

More information

If you are struggling in the area of sexual sin, there are a number of helpful on-line resources available.

www.firesofdarkness.com
www.sexaddict.com
www.xxxchurch.com
www.pureonline.com
www.christiananswers.net
www.pureintimacy.org
www.bebroken.com
www.safefamilies.org
www.careforlifekeys.org

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