

**CHANGING LANES
1 Corinthians 1:1-9**

I. INTRO

- A. A couple of years ago I saw the movie, *Changing Lanes*, starring Ben Affleck and Samuel Jackson. For those of you who haven't seen it, it's a powerful story about two very different men in very different circumstances whose drugs of choice are power and anger.

-Ben plays a wealthy young attorney, Gavin Banek, who is racing to court to file a document—manipulated by his law firm—to in essence steal the company of a dying old man. But his Mercedes collides with that of a guy named Doyle Gipson, played by Samuel Jackson, who is **also** in a hurry—on his way to court to keep his frustrated, estranged wife from taking the his sons far away from him to West Coast.

1. Banek, this cocky attorney--who can still drive his car, leaves Gipson in the driving rain with no transportation, a blank check, and "Better luck next time!" But he **also** leaves the papers he needs to file in court! He is given until the end of the day to file them.

-Gipson's day also goes from bad to a **lot** worse. He's late for his hearing, and it doesn't go in his favor. All he has left are the papers Banek accidentally left with him—and his anger.

-As the film progresses, the tension mounts as both guys get angrier and more vengeful—and take more risks to get even.

They are both finally confronted forcefully with what their anger—and the deterioration of their character--is doing to their lives. So, they **change lanes**.

2. Have you ever been on the highway—when you see the sign telling you that a lane is going to narrow—like to **nothing—no lane**—up ahead? If the highway's busy—you usually have two good choices: To race the person in the lane next to you—or to slow down and humbly pull in behind them. To **not** change lanes isn't a good option!

-There have been times in my life—maybe yours—when the lane I was in was leading to an exit ramp I didn't want to take. I was in the **wrong lane**, and if I didn't see it, respond to it, and change it—I could potentially ruin everything I wanted for my life. Ever been there?

- B. This morning we start a series where we're going to be reading someone else's mail. Pretty exciting, eh? Actually, it's an ancient letter written to a whole church that needed to change lanes. I mean, they were going the **wrong way!** And Paul, the author of the letter is led and inspired the Holy Spirit to speak the truth—and confront them with **TOUGH LOVE**.

-When you're a parent, and you have a child that's on a self-destructive course—permissiveness, or hiding your head in the sand won't do. They need **tough love**. When you have a friend—and they are about to do something **really** stupid and dangerous, they need **tough love**. When you're an ER physician, and someone comes in Code Blue, they need **tough love**.

-Fortunately, God is not squeamish about loving us with **tough love**—and helping us change lanes.

And I am **so** glad He loves me that way! Today, I'd like to whet your appetite with an overall sampling—and leave you with the basic idea that weaves it's way through this entire letter. When I'm done, you'll have to decide what **you're** going to do—and whether you'll come back!

II. YOU'VE GOT MAIL!

- A. Occasionally archaeologists will stumble upon an ancient letter that got tucked away in a safe place—hundreds, sometimes thousands of years ago. When they do, it's usually been written in a language, using stories and metaphors that sound **very** weird to us. Many times, it's part of an ongoing conversation—imbedded with customs, situations and people who have disappeared into this abyss of history. For example, imagine people 2000 years from now reading a letter that says, "Things have changed **so** drastically since 9-11." **We** know what that means. They wouldn't.

-So, to understand old mail—written to someone else in a different time, place, language and culture—you have to make some effort to know the person sending it—and the person it was sent to. You need to understand something about their language, their culture, and what issues they were dealing with—and addressing in the letter.

-What we know as the N.T. **book** of 1 Corinthians—was actually a letter. It was written from a missionary to the group of people he'd gathered into a church in the Greek city of Corinth--some four or five years before. It's called **First** Corinthians because it's the first of two letters that we still have. And it wasn't just casual information and advice; it was written under the inspiration of God.

And to all churches in all times. It's a letter to me—and it's a letter to you.

1. The fortunate thing about this letter is it's been around for a **long** time. Early in the history of the Church, it was placed in a collection of ancient writings that would be recognized as **Scriptures**—God's Word.

-It's written in what was the trade language of that era—called **koine Greek**. Koine Greek would be to that world what English is to ours—not spoken by everyone, but recognized as the main language of trade.

2. There is some **fascinating** background history on the city of Corinth that you can find on our website. Let me just give you a peek into it. Corinth, in fact, was the New York/Toronto/Vancouver of that day. It was cosmopolitan; wealthy; hip—with all of the dangers and junk large cities tend to attract. **[Map on screen]**. It was located down near the southern tip of Greece. Like most well-known cities, it got it's popularity, growth and wealth from being strategically located on a trade-route. -To avoid the danger and expense of traveling the Mediterranean, cargo headed to Italy and Rome from Asia would unload in one port, travel overland on a kind of wooden railroad past Corinth, and then be reloaded onto ships to keep traveling to Italy. And Corinth benefited from all this.

-At the time of this letter (55 AD), the population of Corinth was around 100,000—making it the third largest city in the world. With all the money and travel and people came **all** kinds of stuff.

There was a saying, let's see if I can get it right—what happens in Corinth—**stays** in Corinth. Corinth was legendary for their lax morals. In fact, people in that day invented a new word, to **corinthianize**—and it meant to indulge in wild sexual behavior. They called prostitutes, **Corinthian girls**.

3. But Corinth lived in the shadow of Rome—the super-power of that day. The Roman Emperor didn't just demand that Rome be noticed; he demanded worship. **Caesar is LORD!** So-o-o—Corinth just added the Roman Emperor worship to their already massive collection of gods. One of the things you'll see as we study together, virtually **everything** in the Corinthian culture—meals, restaurants, games, health—was connected to religion.
-As you can imagine—with it's Greek history—philosophy was also a big deal in Corinth. A number of speakers and orators circulated through this city over the years, representing everything from skepticism to stoicism to snake oil—and they were primarily judged, not on the truth or content of **what** they said, but how **eloquently** and **forcefully** they said it.
 4. What about the people Paul was writing to in this church? Well, he first encountered them about 4 or 5 years earlier when he showed up in Corinth to tell them the Good News of Jesus; that God had shown up to save the world.
-Paul had had a pretty rough time in other cities he'd visited prior to Corinth. But in a vision, God comforted him and told him that there were many people in that city who would respond to the message.
So Paul set up his tent-making business so he could meet people, pay the bills, and teach about Jesus.
 5. As you search this book for clues, you find out that the church was made up of both Jews and Gentiles. There were some who were wealthy and influential—but the most of people in the church were either working class people, or slaves. And those differences created some significant problems in the church.
-By the way, if you ever start to get real nostalgic about the early church...**don't!**
As you'll see, they had huge problems!
- B. Now, there's a **ton** of stuff I could tell you. But I'm going to let you read some of that for yourself. Brian Cunnington has written a **commentary** for us on this book. And I want to just challenge you to do some reading! This book deals with more issues that face us in Toronto, 2007, than any other book of the Bible I know of. So...study, and don't miss **any** of our times together! Let me tantalize you a little.
1. In our culture—what do people do when they've been cheated or swindled or injured by someone? They file a...**lawsuit**. So. is it **wrong** to do that? Is it ever right? Well, this book addresses that issue.
 2. In this past year we've looked at both **The Da Vinci Code** and **The Secret**. Have you ever wondered if maybe there is some spiritual knowledge or insight we're missing out on that can make us happier, more contented and healthier? Some people seem to always be saying, "Well, the Lord told me...!" Do some have a higher form of knowledge? Like, is there some spiritual experience we're missing out on?
Something that can instantly take us to a higher spiritual place? Well, we're going to address this!
 3. And what about women and their leadership in the church? Some churches don't allow it. In this letter Paul says some surprising things.

For example. **But there is one thing I want you to know: The head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God (1 Corinthians 11:3 NLT).** Was Paul a fundamentalist redneck, or a male chauvinist? He also says, **Isn't it obvious that it's disgraceful for a man to have long hair (1 Corinthians 11:14 NLT)?** Want me to tell you what's going on? Well, you're gonna have to **wait!**

4. And was Paul sexually uptight and oppressed—and down on marriage? Listen to how he starts chapter 7: **Yes, it is good to live a celibate life,** and later on, **So I say to those who aren't married and to widows—it's better to stay unmarried, just as I am. But if they can't control themselves, they should go ahead and marry. It's better to marry than to burn with lust (1 Corinthians 7:1, 8-9 NLT).** Any women here who would be impressed with a proposal from a man who said, "I want to marry you so I don't burn with lust!" What's going on? -And what about **divorce?** When is it okay? When is it not? And what do you do if you've blown everything God's said about it out of the water? Tough issues, eh? And we're going to address this stuff!

5. And what about some of the issues we face in our culture? Is it okay to have sex before marriage—if you really love each other? And does God care about our constant need for more—and a self-indulgent lifestyle? What about the stuff the Bible doesn't specifically mention. Things like pornography, bulimia, YouTube, SouthPark, and Black Metal music. How do you make decisions? Does living out our God-given inalienable rights and freedoms mean we can abort babies, euthanize others and just work out a lifestyle that focuses on our personal happiness?

-And is it okay to download music off the internet, buy pirated CDs, gorge yourself at MacDonald's and own more house than you can afford? Is it okay to play golf? If so, **how much?** Is God a cat person or a dog person? Well, we all know the answer to that! He's a **dog** person! Are there principles we can follow in making good decisions about this kind of stuff? **Anti-ci-pa-shun..!** You're gonna have to **wait!**

6. And what about the gift of tongues? What is it—really? Does God want everyone to have it—and if He does, why don't we use it in our services? Like, if we were to get back to the way the early church did things—would we have to change everything? Are we doing worship and teaching right? What about communion? -Paul says some **scary** things about messing this up. **For if you eat the bread or drink the cup without honoring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking God's judgment upon yourself. That is why many of you are weak and sick and some have even died (1 Corinthians 11:29-30 NLT.** What's **that** about? Maybe communion should have a warning label on it: "Do it wrong and you'll **die!**" Well, we're going to spend some time dealing with that. But you have to...**wait!**

7. So, what do you think—are you interested? I am! I can't wait to dig into this stuff! Now—something important. There's a **really important component** to this that **won't** happen in these services. Have you ever wished you could be part of an

open discussion of some of the things we talk about here in services? ***You're going to get that chance!***

-Our plan is to ***really*** up the profile and participation in small groups in this season. The small groups are going to be ***coordinated with the teaching at services!*** You will ***want*** to be a part of that—and build some great friendships in the process. Today in your bulletins, we have more info—and a place to say, ***I'm in—*** or at least, ***I'm interested!*** We'll help make that happen, okay? We've got a great year ahead of us!

III. **YOU'RE GOING THE WRONG WAY!**

- A. One of the most famous plays in football history was made in the 1929 Rose Bowl by a guy named Roy Riegels—the captain of the California Tech football team. He recovered a fumble made by Georgia Tech—was shoved—somehow totally lost his bearings, and headed, full tilt, toward his **OWN** goal line. If you're not into football—the wrong way.

-Of course, the crowd was going wild—the opposing fans cheering wildly, his own coach, teammates and fans screaming, ***"You're going the wrong way!"*** He almost scored for Georgia Tech—but was tackled by his own teammates on the 1 yard line. It cost his team the game and the Rose Bowl--by one point. And since then he has been remembered through history as ***Wrong Way Riegels***. How would you like to wear something like that for the rest of your life?

1. This church Paul wrote this letter to was a little like Roy Riegels, as I see it. Talented. Gifted. Going ***really*** fast—but headed the wrong way in the one game that mattered most. Listen to what Paul says to them:

I always thank my God for you and for the gracious gifts he has given you, now that you belong to Christ Jesus. Through him, God has enriched your church in every way—with all of your eloquent words and all of your knowledge. This confirms that what I told you about Christ is true. Now you have every spiritual gift you need as you eagerly wait for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will keep you strong to the end so that you will be free from all blame on the day when our Lord Jesus Christ returns. God will do this, for he is faithful to do what he says, and he has invited you into partnership with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor.1:3-9 NLT).

These people had a **lot** to offer. They belonged to the God of the Universe, they had been forgiven and changed—and they had the power of Heaven behind them. They were eloquent, talented, gifted, knowledgeable and passionate. But Paul goes on to tell them: ***You're going the WRONG WAY!*** He would be the fellow teammate who tackled them on the one yard line!

 - a. The division and fighting and jealousy showed that they were going the wrong way in their relationships.
 - b. They were the poster children of pride! In their own estimation they had surpassed Paul in their knowledge and spirituality—and had rejected his authority!
 - c. There was sexual immorality in the church. There was lawsuit-mania! Judge Judy was their patron saint. Their men were visiting prostitutes; they were confused about marriage, about communion, about worship, about spiritual gifts, about love, about the resurrection.

-Know what the worst part of all this was? **They had no idea they were going the wrong way!** To feel the impact of this letter on their church, put yourself in the place of a Wrong Way Riegel. You're running hard for a touchdown—just imagining the fame, the cheers—teammates pouring champagne all over you. Your narcissism is interrupted by getting knocked down—and the guy who tackled you is wearing **your** colors! What would you think? **Wha-a-at?**

2. Believe it or not, the problems this church was dealing with were symptoms of a single disease—in fact, the single most deadly disease of a true follower of Jesus. See if you can pick up on it:
 - *This other guy teaches in a way **I** can respect!
 - ***I** have it together more than others!
 - *You're not going to tell **me** what to do!
 - *No one is going to treat **me** like that!
 - *My body and my sexuality is **my** business!
 - *If my marriage doesn't meet **my** needs, I'm outta there!
 - *Why should I have to share **my** food?
 - *I believe **my** rights are important to God!
 - ***I'm** more spiritual than you because **I** speak in tongues!

-The disease, in case you haven't picked up on it, is the **me first** disease. **My** preferences, **my** needs, **my** plan, **my** time, **my** beliefs, **my** friends. And that's exactly what Paul deals with in 1 Corinthians 13. The love chapter. We read this chapter at weddings, and everyone says, "Awww! That's so **beautiful!**" When this was read publicly for the first time at their gatherings, they would've been staring at their feet.
3. They had dragged their arrogance, their self-promotion, their **I-have-my-rights!** Philosophy into every arena of life. They took it to work, to bed, to supper, to communion—and right to the very center of their worship—where they tirelessly self-promoted their spirituality and their knowledge. And Paul had to say, "When gifts become about you—they turn to garbage. Noise. When your knowledge and ministry becomes about you—and your ego needs—they become worthless. When your self-sacrifice and concern for the poor and needy becomes about your pride, and your deep sense that you're a little more spiritual than others—it all becomes **nothing!**"
 - As this description of love was read that day to this community—it didn't anyone warm fuzzies. It was a description of what they were **not**.
 - *Love is patient; they were **very** impatient—especially with those they felt weren't keeping up with them
 - *Love is kind; they were extremely unkind—and they weren't at all shy about nailing others who got in their way.
 - *Love does not envy; they envied Paul's authority; they envied each other's gifts—they did **envy really** well!
 - *Love does not boast; they were bragging about their knowledge and their insight into God's secrets.

*Love is not proud; they were thoroughly arrogant.

*Love is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered. Their lives were about self-advancement—and it made them mad when anyone challenged them or corrected them. It's pretty clear that even Paul wasn't spared when it came to their rudeness.

-Paul says; ***You're going the wrong way! Even when you do the right things, they are contaminated by your loveless attitude!*** I love you more than I can tell you—enough to tackle you and stop you and help you find your way!

- B. Let's talk about the heart. Twenty-two days after you were conceived, a tiny, imperceptible electrical pulse—called an ***atrial kick***--stimulated your heart muscle—and that was the very first beat of your heart. It's been beating ever since—14,000 pints of blood pumped every day—in a heart that beats 100,000 times a day.
- We live in a world that is extremely knowledgeable—***obsessed***, really, with the health of that heart.
- Whole books are written about how to eat like a rabbit and have a heart like a lion. If heart disease runs in your family like it runs in mine, this is a ***excellent*** time to be alive. I say that with all sincerity.

-But I'm not sure living at this time is as good for our true heart. You know, the invisible one that Jesus talked so much about. The inner me. The part of me that chooses, the part that devotes, the part that commits, the part that wills. I run and try to eat well—but, even so, my heart—the ***pump***—will wear out someday. But ***this*** heart—the real me—will last forever. So, I need to be careful—and so do you. The Bible says, ***Above all else guard your heart for it is the wellspring of your life (Proverbs 4:23 NIV)***. In other words, know it; protect it; care for it—because the life that ***really*** matters flows from it!

1. It's possible, like the Corinthians, to be deceived about the real condition of your heart. That's true physically and spiritually, really. In purely physical terms, I can look at you—and you look really healthy, but I don't know whether or not you have heart disease.
- I was reading what a research cardiologist wrote, and he said that there are a lot of simple tests that can be done with the heart, including an EKG—and a person can look perfectly healthy. Apart from a CATscan, the only way to know how the healthy the heart really is, is to put it under stress. If you don't examine a person under stress, you may never know that there's a problem—and it could be life-threatening.

-I've told you that my Grandfather died at 47 of a massive heart attack. The summer before he died, my Dad swam with him across the face of a dam—something they'd done many times before. When my Grandfather got to the shore he said, "Man—I got so out of breath, I almost didn't make it." He felt the results of stress—he just didn't know what to do with it—and it killed him.

2. When it comes to our spiritual lives—the health of our heart for God, it's very easy to think everything's okay. I come to church and worship—and I see myself worshipping and think, "Wow! I think I really love God!" We sing a chorus that

brings tears to our eyes and it causes us to think tender thoughts about God—and think, “I must really love God.”

-We learn a new truth about who God is—and anxiously share it with friends and think about how much we love truth and the Bible. We hear or read about someone doing something extravagant for the poor, or see World Vision cards with kids pictures on them—and are moved—and think, “I must really have a heart for God!”

-And then we run into a stress test. We run into relational junk with someone we’re close to; or someone doesn’t cooperate with what we want them to do, or something at work doesn’t go the way I want, or someone makes a snide remark that hurts me, or I don’t have the resources I want to have...got to have. Some changes comes along that I’m not crazy about—or didn’t vote for. It comes time to be faithful with a promise I made that is going to cost me to keep. Along comes my custom-made temptation from an evil one who knows me oh so **very** well. It’s a spiritual **stress** test—and it’s under **those** conditions that I find out how loving and generous and patient and faithful and kind and gentle I am. Whether I’m really going the right way—or the wrong way.

3. And, I think, that’s the Corinthian Church in a nutshell—and it’s why we’re **so** like them. Knowledge? Did **they** ever have knowledge? They were taught by an **apostle! An eye-witness of Jesus!** Supernatural phenomena and ecstatic spiritual gifts? They had that one nailed. Their worship times were crazy-exciting! They were quite confident in debating the many other religions and philosophies that came down the pike—and there were a **lot!**

-But when the stress was on—there was jealousy and division. When the stress was on, they used their gifts to show off and strut their stuff. When the stress was on—they caved to the same old sexual junk and greed they’d been saturated in—and then excused it all on philosophical basis.

-To summarize, when the stress was on, they weren’t in the faith for others—or even for Jesus. They were in it for themselves! It was **all** about me. When Paul wrote this letter, it was like shock paddles for a church that was **Code Blue!** That’s when Paul said, “You’ve missed the point! It’s all about loving God and loving others—it’s **not** about you!”

4. When what I want gets frustrated—when I’m not the shining star I’d hoped I was, when **my** way and **my** plans and **my** ego are challenged—that creates stress. And what happens in that stress reveals the **true** condition of my heart.

-What does my heart want for me? Well, it wants me to have a reputation for being better than I really am. When I look down deep inside, my heart wants the exaltation of **me**. My heart wants credit I don’t deserve. When I look down inside, I find that my heart is quite willing to deceive to avoid pain. My heart is so wrapped up in my problems and issues and desires that it sometimes doesn’t notice, listen to or love others. My heart is quite willing to judge others to make **me** feel better about my own weakness or envy.

-My heart, left to itself, will go the wrong way every time. I don’t just need someone to shout at me from the sidelines. I need someone who is prepared to tackle me! That’s why I need to live in community—be on a team with others who really know me and love me enough to tell me the truth.

IV. CLOSING

- A. One of the reasons we're inviting you into this teaching for a whole year—and into a small group where you can ask questions, pray with others and build friendships is this: The **Jesus**' Way is never intended as a solo flight. It's intended to be lived in both the mess—and the intimacy of community.

- B. With that in mind, I have a question for you this morning. It's a very **important** question. How's your heart—not in worship services, but in the stress test of the everyday? Let's do this **together!** Let's encourage and help one another and work **together** to build **great hearts!**