

Dr. Henry Brandt was a Christian psychologist of the preceding generation. He once told the story of a trip he and his wife took. They were traveling an interstate highway somewhere in Michigan. They approached an exit ramp, and his wife said, “Henry, I think you should get off here.”

Henry said, “No, it isn’t this one. Our exit is up ahead.” The Mileage Sign said, “Ann Arbor – 60 Miles,” and they drove on.

They approached the next exit, and his wife said, “Henry, let’s get off here and ask someone for directions.”

Henry said, “I don’t need directions.” And the Mileage Sign said, “Ann Arbor – 52 Miles,” and they drove on. They passed another exit, and as Brandt said, “I knew I had gone too far, but I didn’t want to admit it.” When the Mileage Sign said, “Ann Arbor – 49 miles,” his wife had long since given up, and even Brandt had to admit that it made no sense to pretend any longer that he knew where he was going.

Ain’t freedom great! Yes, it is! Of course, if your freedom is taking you closer to Ann Arbor, and the wedding is in East Lansing, it’s not a good thing.

### How to Have a Good Trip

Freedom of choice always needs help in choosing wisely. Dr. Brandt had plenty of help. He had inside help. He said himself, “I knew I had gone too far.” He also had external help. Twice, his wife suggested they get off the Interstate, and the mileage signs kept telling him in their cold and unsympathetic way that he was getting further from East Lansing, where he wanted to go, and closer to Ann Arbor, where he didn’t want to go. He ignored both kinds of help repeatedly. Why? “I didn’t want to admit it.”

I wonder if that’s why he never took advantage of the best help he could have had that day. He left home without directions. Did he not want to admit he needed directions? Did his obstinate heart go that far?

The first truth that leads us to God is that the human family doesn’t want to admit that we need directions for our life journey. We refuse God. We drift away from God. We forget God. In the Apostle Paul’s memorable statement: **Although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened** – Romans 1:21.

And God lets us have our way. He still offers help, but He lets us drive the car, and if we ignore His guidance, He doesn’t take back the wheel. He says, “I made you free, and free you shall be.” But if your freedom is taking you closer to Ann Arbor, when the wedding is in East Lansing, it’s not a good thing. And this permission slip to have our own way about things has consequences more serious than missing a wedding. We see those consequences writ large across TV and the Internet and our own small lives. We see people **full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice** – Romans 1:29.

This is a good time to read the first half of Romans 11:32. It summarizes this first truth about God and Man. **God has bound all men over to disobedience.** He does it by letting us have our way until our uses of freedom makes life unworkable in significant ways. *The Message* is a paraphrase of the Bible. It expresses verse 32a this way. “God makes sure that we all experience what it means to be outside.” When your marriage goes sideways or your sexual desires master you, or you lie or betray a friend, or you feel terribly guilty, or you find in yourself a surprising yearning for God, then you really feel like you are outside looking in; and, like Henry Brandt, you may not want to admit it.

## The Turn

Of course, you know that only one course of action made sense for Dr. Brandt. He had to turn the car around and go back, and he would still need to ask someone for directions to their destination. Sometimes the only way forward is to go back. The rest of verse 32 tells you why we can go back. **God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.** *The Message* puts it this way: “God makes sure that we all experience what it means to be outside so that he can personally open the door and welcome us back in.”

At some point you admit that your life is incomplete. You admit that the only way forward is to go back to God. The proper name for turning around and going back to God is repentance.

The shock of repentance is to discover the mercy of God. Most people live with such bad feelings about themselves and about God that they expect God to be harsh with them. It is an explosion of freedom to be told that **when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son** – Romans 5:10. He has personally opened the door and stands there to welcome us back into His house as friends of God.

That’s why this congregation and hundreds of thousands worldwide like it matter so much. We are not a community of people who finally got good enough to get in here. We finally came to our senses and realized that we were going in the wrong direction, and the only way forward was to go back to God.

We confess that Jesus is Lord. We believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead. And we meet together in order to be with other people who have this same new life in their hearts, and we help each other stay close to Him and learn to follow the guidance He offers for our lives.

We learn very slowly how to obey the guidance He gives, and we know that obedience to God will put us at odds with some of the ways of the world, but that’s okay; we don’t want to be separated from God ever again.

We also know how disobedient we could again become at any moment. As the old hymn puts it: “Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it; prone to leave the God I love.” We just don’t want to be separated from God ever again.

We are the elect, who carry forward the God’s purpose to offer mercy to every nation on earth. The face of the Church is to be the face of God turned toward Man in mercy.

If you would like to join us on our journey back to God, then confess openly, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead. Be baptized, and join yourself to this community of Christians. Help us to build something here that will bless the Brandywine Valley. You can grow in your knowledge of God at your own pace, and you will grow here.

## The Signs of Mercy

And now, “before us the table is spread. Here awaits the wine. Here awaits the bread. Here, where our souls are fed.” Our souls are fed here, because the bread and wine, which we can hold and taste, reassure us in a material way that God is merciful to Man. If you have confessed openly that Jesus is Lord, and if you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, then, come, eat and drink the Supper of the Lord, and be at peace.

Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!  
Who has known the mind of the Lord?  
Or who has been his counselor?  
Who has ever given to God that God should repay him?  
For from him and through him and to him are all things.  
To him be the glory forever! Amen.