

# *Culture of Repentance*



Lesson Objective:

The objective of this lesson will be to understand the lifestyle of repentance as it becomes the attitude of the heart with the willingness to change the way we think and thus enable us to grasp the kingdom of God on earth.

Key Scripture:

***Matthew 4:17** From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

## **Evolution of Understanding**

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Several hundred years ago, a great persecution rose up against those who dared to believe a new revelation of truth that spread throughout the then known world. Classified as heretics and blasphemers, these men of renowned intelligence put their life on the line to stand behind what they believed to be reality. Some even had to flee their country and homeland to find security in other nations that were less threatening to their lives. What was this truth that threatened the lives of these believers? A man, who risked his life in faith of this truth led three ships across the Atlantic ocean. This man was Christopher Columbus and this truth was simply that the earth was round and not flat.

We can look back on it now and see how ridiculous it was to believe such a thing as the world being flat. Yet the Church secured its position with misinterpreted Scriptures and dared those who would defy them with accusations of heresy, persecution and even death.

Then for many years, the belief was that the earth was the center of the galaxy. However, with the aid of scientific research, mathematical calculations, and the invention of the telescope, it was then proven that the earth was not the center of the galaxy but rather the sun. Once again, the "Church" was left taking an embarrassing position in its doctrine.

We have all seen the above scenarios played out in the lives of people we have come to know. We probably know people who basically live in their own little world. They seldom leave their city and only go to work, home, church, the market, and never really adventure out beyond that. They discovered their comfort zone and choose to be happy within their boundaries and routine living. They choose a religion that makes them feel good about themselves with a minimum amount of effort on their part to secure a sense of

righteousness, which will keep them from judgment and punishment from God. These individuals are like those who are comfortable within a flat world mentality. They don't like risk or change and will get upset at those who threaten their routine or comfort.

We have probably also known individuals who believe they are the center of their universe. These are those who want the world to rotate around them and everything around them should make them successful and happy. If you are around them for very long, you can feel the gravitational pull to submit to their orbit of control and do the things that they please and agree with their opinions, traditions, and philosophies. If these individuals remain married, it is only because they have found the submissive spouse who will cater to their wants and pleasures. If an individual asteroid (free will) passes through the atmosphere of their orbit, traveling their own path, it is usually met with a violent reaction.

The history of the "Church" itself has also played into these scenarios. There have been churches that set boundaries of traditions and rules to provide for their parishioners a sense of security, comfort and acceptance. They offer a religion that is acceptable to man's intelligence but never go further than mere traditions based upon philosophies, which for some is safe, secure, and requires no risk of change.

There have been other churches that believed they are the "what's happening" church. They believe that their organization or denomination has a grasp of all truth and that if anyone were truly doing the will of God, they would have to come into their orbit and join their organization. In fact, the word "denomination" means, divided nation. They are organizations that have divided themselves from the whole to become its own entity.

Both of these scenarios played a destructive part in our churches in the fact that they divided the body of Christ and caused many to become "Lone Rangers" or "Islands" unto themselves. These mentalities have brought many under the rule of a religious spirit that either gives them a sense of being in control, or being under control.

Then, there are those who have come to the realization of the truth that the "Son" is indeed the center of their galaxy and that their lives exist to orbit around Him, reflecting His light and glory around them. Yet there is a weakness to slip back into deception and begin to establish boundary lines for comfort sake, which we don't like to venture beyond. This puts limits on our acts of faith, which require risk. Or we may begin to fall into the control mode of being the center of our own little universe again. This is the tendency to put our ministries, gifts and talents at the center of importance, thus affecting those we are ministering with or to. We know this is a lie and a deception, yet we catch ourselves slipping back.

## **One Purpose, One Purpose Alone**

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Scientists have now developed the technology to see further into space than they have ever conceived. They have discovered that our sun is actually not the center of the universe, but we are one among billions upon billions of galaxies scattered throughout the universe. Furthermore, these galaxies and stars appear to be in motion as if they too are in an extending orbit around a center somewhere out there that science has yet to discover.

What was Jesus' ultimate purpose while He was here on this earth? We believe Jesus came to die for our sins and pay the price for our redemption. Yet that was not the ultimate purpose Jesus had in mind. We also believe He came to destroy the works of the evil one. Yet that too was not His ultimate purpose. The list could go on referring to the things Jesus said and did and yet He had one purpose and one purpose alone; Jesus came to do the will of the Father. In doing the will of the Father, He accomplished all these other things, but only because they were in the Father's will.

Jesus was so set upon the Father's will that He said nothing He did not first hear His Father say, nor did anything He first did not see Him do. Jesus' whole life orbited, so to speak, around the will of His Father. The Father's will became the reality of His purpose on earth. And with the ultimate will of God as his one and only purpose He preached, "The kingdom of God is at hand." The will of God and the kingdom of God are inseparable.

## Kingdom Understanding is Still Evolving

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Key Point: ***Understanding that our knowledge of the kingdom of God is still in the process of growing, is a key to remaining humble and teachable.***

It is easy to look back and see how our understanding of the universe has evolved and yet not see that our own understanding of kingdom reality may still be in a process of evolution. We have probably all had those embarrassing situations where we find out that what we thought was true turned out to be only partly true or false and we had to change the way we thought about matters.

**1 Corinthians 13:9-12** <sup>9</sup> For we know in part and we prophesy in part, <sup>10</sup> but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. <sup>12</sup> Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. (NIV)

Paul understood that he was only seeing a part of a greater reality in the kingdom of God. He understood that the mysteries that were being revealed to him were actually laying a foundation upon which others would come and build.<sup>1</sup> Because of this partial understanding, we have the propensity to not only build with what revelation we have received but also with the opinions of what we have perceived. The history of the church has proven that it not only builds with the good things of God but also with the opinions and traditions of men, who believed they were right.

## Tradition vs. Truth

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**Mark 7:6-13** <sup>6</sup> And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me.' <sup>7</sup> 'But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.' <sup>8</sup> 'Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.'" <sup>9</sup> He was also saying to them, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. <sup>10</sup> 'For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother, is to be put to death'; <sup>11</sup> but

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<sup>1</sup> 1Corinthians 3:10

*you say, 'If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),'<sup>12</sup> you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother;<sup>13</sup> thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that."*

**Key Point:** ***Tradition is a powerful influence that can keep us from advancing in the kingdom of God.***

Tradition is a powerful influence upon our reasoning and will seek to create a mindset that becomes a stronghold against present truths the Holy Spirit reveals. Jesus said that the traditions of men were so powerful in fact that they could actually make the Word of God ineffective in our lives.

The New International Version translates Mark 7:13 this way, *"Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down to you."* Jesus indicated that the Pharisees did many things according to tradition that invalidated, nullified, and made of none effect, God's Word. "Nullify" translated from the Greek word *akyrountes*, has its root in *akyroō*, which is a legal term for annulling contracts. The Scribes and Pharisees were like lawyers looking for loop holes in the law to serve their best interests. They would make amendments to the law that would supersede the intent of the law. It would be like government representatives today making amendments to the nation's constitution which annuls the intent of the constitution, empowering them to perform acts contrary to the constitution.

These amendments, or traditions, had a root that Jesus exposes from His quote of Isaiah 29, *'This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me.'* In other words, their acts of worship was simply lip service and was not motivated out of true honor that comes from the heart. When you disconnect the motivation of love indicated in one's relationship with God and one's relationship to family and neighbors, then behavior becomes an act. Hypocrites simply mean, actors. The motivating force founding the laws of God were in, *"loving the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and soul,"* and also in *"loving one another."*<sup>2</sup> In other words, the law was a standard which basically meant, *"This is how you can honor our relationship by valuing what is important to me. And, this is how you can protect the relationships between one another by valuing what is important to others. The traditions of men excluded the loving intent of the law and placed self-interest above the law.*

Jesus then uses an illustration from among the many to verify that what they are doing was undeniable. He uses the fifth commandment of God to honor your parents. It is a law of God that included a blessing to those who demonstrate honor, that of having a long and prosperous life. The "Corban" vow was only one example of many others (such as restrictive Sabbath rules), where scribal tradition distorted and obscured the Laws of God. The Corban vow effectively put tradition above God's word. "Corban" is the Greek transliteration of a Hebrew term used to refer to a gift devoted to God. It was dedicatory formula pronounced over money and property donated to the temple and its service by an inviolable vow. If a son declared that the resources needed to support his aging parents, even if those resources were received through inheritance, and these were declared as "Corban" then, according to scribal tradition, he was exempt from this commandment to honor his parents. His parents were thus excluded from any claim for those resources. This vow held priority over any honor due to the parents and responsibility to the family. So they no longer allowed the son to do anything for his parents.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 22:37-40

<sup>3</sup> Notes taken from; The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty & Life Application New Testament Commentary

**Key Point:** *Tradition is the product of ideas, philosophies and cultural practices, which are habitually rehearsed until they are believed to be a reality.*

Tradition is the product of ideas, philosophies and cultural practices, which are habitually rehearsed until we believe they are or represent a reality. Once a tradition has been sealed as reality in our minds, they are equaled in our opinion with the divine Word of God. They influence our perception in the way we view anything presenting itself as “present” truth. In other words, if a present truth is introduced that does not agree with our traditional beliefs, then we conclude it must be error. Thus, we will be more likely to cling to a tradition rather than change.

Tradition becomes part of our emotional fabric through a simple mental process. Once we come into agreement and accept a certain opinion, the mind begins to seek equilibrium. In other words, if you believe it to be true, the mind seeks to prove it is true. The mind will process past and present circumstances through the lenses of this opinion and verify its validity. In fact, if you do not determine something to be false and you continually expose yourself to the idea or behavior, it will, in time, be determined to be an acceptable truth and even divinely inspired. The opinions of men brings subtle deceit, mixing truth with opinions based on logical reasoning, filling in the gaps between precepts, and even lies from darkness, which in turn prevents the reality of God’s Word from impacting the individual. The mind works till your beliefs, core values, and your sense of reality are well balanced.<sup>4</sup>

There is a set of nerves at the base of the brain called the *Reticular Activating System*. Once we accept something or pass judgment on a thing as being agreeable, activity in this area of the brain affects our reasoning process. A neurological process begins in our brain to establish this idea as being a fact. It then alters our ability to perceive reality through a perspective that is looking for positive proof. It literally causes us to see it as we believe it to be. This process is called “selective reasoning.” In selective reasoning we stop seeing things as they truly are and seek to prove what we have already chosen to believe. What you hear and what you see are translated through these lenses of our belief system and can altar reality.<sup>5</sup>

**Key Point:** *Traditions begin the moment we insist of what we perceive to be true.*

Our traditions begin the moment we insist of what we perceive to be true. The moment a new paradigm is established, we have begun to form a new tradition, which ultimately becomes a stronghold against the things of God. It is at that moment that we become blind to anything other than our point of view. These paradigms become so ingrained in our emotional make-up we begin a process of unquestioned repetition until we can’t conceive any other point of view, including God’s.<sup>6</sup>

## Repent, Change the Way You Think

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**Matthew 4:17** *From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*

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<sup>4</sup> “Satan Unmasked” by Dr. James B. Richards, Impact Ministries, © 1998 by Dr. James B. Richards, pgs.13-16

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

Jesus began His ministry by preaching the message, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” He continually and constantly taught that God’s kingdom was to be the center of our lives. It is in His kingdom that we discover our purpose and destiny, where the will of God our Father has its rule and domain. In fact, the word “kingdom” literally means, the kings domain. In essence, Jesus was saying to surrender our allegiance from the kingdoms of this world to the kingdom of God’s rule and reign.

Key Point: ***Surrendering our allegiance from the kingdoms of this world to the kingdom of God’s rule and reign is an aspect of repentance.***

The kingdom of heaven being at hand is a statement that basically says this, ‘Heaven is not only my eternal destination, it is a present reality that carries the potential for greater things.’ However, the condition of being able to take a hold of this present kingdom is directly related to our ability to ‘repent.’

We love to see the altars filled with people who have been bound up in sin weeping at the altar and crying out to God for forgiveness from a heart that is desperate for Him. It is thrilling to hear the testimonies of those who have turned away from a sinful lifestyle to live a life of surrender to Jesus’ lordship. All these are great, but they are the fruit of repentance. Repentance literally means, to change our way of thinking in such a way that our behavior follows in accordance to an inner change. Most Christians repent enough to be forgiven, but few repent enough to see the kingdom of God manifest in their lives. If we don’t change the way we think, we can never see the kingdom that is right in front of our face, nor access the enabling grace God gives to experience transformation.

Key Point: ***Repentance actually means, “to change your way of thinking.”***

Jesus said in essence, ‘Repent, because I have the most wonderful news possible. Heaven has just invaded your midst and if you change the way you think according to what has been revealed, you shall see it manifest in your life. You may not fully understand what you see, but you will see it. And if you can see it then you can also take hold of it and bring the reality of heaven into the impossibilities of earth.’ Our ability to change the way we think when God manifests Himself among us, comes with the awareness that there is much more of what God intends to do. An attitude of repentance prepares our hearts for more of God.

Key Point: ***If we don’t change the way we think, we will not see the kingdom of God right in front of us.***

If a person changes their way of thinking about sin, about its effect in their lives, then the result will also be a change of behavior. It is only in changing the way we think that we can discover the focus of our purpose and destiny. Repentance is not complete until it envisions His Kingdom. The focus of repentance is to change our way of thinking until the presence of His Kingdom fills our consciousness. If the kingdom is at hand, then we must acknowledge that it dwells in an invisible realm. Yet, being at hand reminds us that it also within reach. That which is unseen can only be realized through repentance. The revelation of the kingdom is received as the heart of man yields to it in humility, and in the surrendering of our mindsets to the mind of Christ.

## Do Not be Conformed

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**Romans 12:2** *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Key Point: ***The kingdom of God posses a culture that is contrary to what is familiar to us.***

Within the kingdom of God, there is a culture that exists which is contrary to the understanding we have become accustomed to in this earthly realm. There are truths that we have failed to comprehend because in the natural realm they sound foolish. According to the Bible, we have many examples of these differences of truth that require paradigm shifts in our understanding of the kingdom of God. These are just a few of the examples: in order to live you must die; in order to gain you must loose; in order to receive you must give; and in order to be lifted up you must lower yourself in humility. These principles are contrary to our reasoning and intellect. They can, in fact, sound very foolish to the natural way of thinking. However, if we are going to grasp the kingdom of heaven, we will have to be transformed in the way we think.

Key Point: ***Conformity is being formed to become like the cultures of the world.***

This transformation is in direct conflict with this world. The warning that Paul gives is to not allow ourselves to be conformed to the way the world thinks. Conformity is being shaped or formed to look and act like everyone else around us. Conformity begins with coming into agreement. Every thought and consequent action in our life speaks of allegiance to either truth or a lie. Both are empowered by our agreement. Renewing our minds means learning to recognize what comes from darkness, and what comes from heaven, and agreeing with heaven.

## Proving the Will of God

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Key Point: ***It is only from God's perspective that we are able to test, discern, and approve the choices set before us as being His will for us.***

The Greek word for "may prove" is the word, *dokimozo*. *Dokimozo* means, "to test, scrutinize, so as to decide to approve."<sup>7</sup> Paul was exhorting the church in Rome to change the way they were thinking by gaining the perspective of God's kingdom from God's viewpoint.

It is only from the perspective of God's viewpoint that we are able to test, discern and approve the choices set before us that lead us along the path of His will. In other words, in this journey of life, we will come to crossroads and forks in our paths that look good and righteous but may not necessarily be God's will for us.

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<sup>7</sup> from *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*. Copyright ©1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.

By gaining God's perspective we can discern between God's path, the good path, and especially over the wrong path.

One of the major functions of miracles and supernatural living is to offer immediate, irrefutable proof of what God wants to happen on earth. It demonstrates who God is by showing what His reality looks like.<sup>8</sup> These are signs that reveal that we are heading in the right direction.

If I am traveling down a road that I have never been before, going to a place that is new to me, I am very appreciative of the road signs along the way. They indicate I have not missed a turn off and that I am still heading in the right direction. It would also be foolish of me to stop at one of those signs and believe I have arrived. The sign is only meant to lead us to the reality of our destination.

**Key Point:** ***Ministry involves the demonstration of God's kingdom reality before the world.***

Our job as true believers is to demonstrate that the reality that exists in heaven is openly displayed before the world in which we live. These demonstrations of heaven on earth act as signs to the unbeliever, and those who are weak in faith, which point the way into the will of God. We are not just to be a people who believe the right things about God, but people who put the will of God on display, expressing it and causing others to realize, "Oh, so that is what God is like." Healing and deliverance and restoration do much more than solve the immediate problem; they give people a concrete demonstration of who God is.<sup>9</sup>

When we do the will of God, we bring an invasion of Kingdom reality that impacts the natural world around. It also violently crashes into the works of the devil. There is no struggle between light and darkness. When light comes in, darkness flees without resistance. It has no power to overcome light.

We need to understand the anointing that we carry. As children of light, there is a radiance that emanates from us bringing change around us. When we come within the proximity of another person there is an influence that emanates from us that takes authority over what is tormenting them.

**Key Point:** ***Ministry has never been about what we can do for God, but rather what God can do through us.***

The average person thinks at about 1500 words a minute. Eighty percent of that is unconscious dialog. The majority of self-talk within the mind of an average person is not positive. It is negative thinking and torment. But, when they come into the radius of a Spirit filled believer who is walking in the will of God and in His favor, there is an immediate binding of hell over that person. Suddenly they are under the influence of the anointing that they carry. The will of God is revealed to them.

Because we live in a culture of love, joy and peace, when we enter into the influence of others, they will start feeling and thinking better. Our assignment has never been about what we can do for God, but what God can do through us. The essence of the will of God is to imitate Jesus by demonstrating the kingdom of God within us, which has the propensity to destroy the works of the devil.

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<sup>8</sup> "The Supernatural Power of a Transformed Mind" by Bill Johnson, Copyright ©2005. Destiny Image Publishers, Inc. pg.35

<sup>9</sup> Ibid



## Transformed, by the Renewing of Your Minds

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Key Point: ***Our minds being transformed begins by coming into agreement with the will and mission of God.***

To be of any use to the Kingdom of God, our minds must be transformed. The same word used as *transformed* in Romans 12:2 is the same word used as *transfigured* in Matthew 17:2. We find a clue to what this word means in the transfiguration of Jesus when He became a radiant light and talked with Moses and Elijah. The reality of heaven radiated through Jesus as he was changed from an earthly form into a heavenly one. Thus, the renewed mind emanates the reality of heaven's brilliance. It is not simply that our thoughts are different, but that our way of thinking is transformed because we think from a different reality – from heaven toward earth.<sup>10</sup> When we come into agreement with the revealed will and mission of God, our minds become powerful tools in the hands of God. We think with the mind of Christ. We are enabled to see what the Father is doing so that we may partner with Him. We are enabled to hear what the Father is saying so that we become His mouthpiece.

## Renewal Begins with Repentance

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Key Point: ***Repentance is the gateway of returning to our original mission on earth to multiply, take dominion, and rule.***

Renewing of the mind begins with repentance. Repentance is the gateway of returning to our original mission on earth to multiply, take dominion, and rule. "Re" means to go back. "Pent" is like the penthouse, the top floor of a building. Repent, then, means to go back to God's perspective on reality. And in that perspective there is a renewal, a reformation that affects our minds, our emotions, attitudes, and every part of our lives. God wants us to see reality from His perspective and to live from the invisible toward the visible world.

Key Point: ***Repent means to return to God's perspective on reality.***

Most Christians have repented enough to be forgiven, but not enough to gain heaven's perspective. They go part of the way but stop short from God's viewpoint and living in a land of promise and blessing.

Key Point: ***The fruit of repentance is conversion – choosing the right direction.***

The fruit of repentance is conversion. You stop going in the direction of destruction and go in the opposite direction towards abundant life. Conversion puts you at the entrance of an entirely new way of living, but there is a lifetime of experience that journeys beyond into a promised land. Many begin at conversion but

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<sup>10</sup> *The Supernatural Power of a Transformed Mind* by Bill Johnson, Copyright ©2005. Destiny Image Publishers, Inc. pg.42

then are reluctant or ignorant and fail to receive the fullness of what Christ paid for. They never enter into their full purpose and are still falling short of the glory God intended for His glorious church. It is not enough to simply cross the river of baptism into the Holy Spirit, we must go all the way and fight for the land God has promised to His Church.

## **Conclusion:**

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Repentance goes further than a one-time event at the altar of some church, or under a tree somewhere alone with God. It is a way of living that we adapt our minds to. It is taking every thought captive and making it obedient to the will of God while conforming to the mind of Christ, or the way He thinks. The culture of a repentant lifestyle is a heart that is poised and ready to turn, change and adapt to the revelations that come from the Father by the Holy Spirit. He speaks, we listen. He enables and we act resulting in transformation, as revelation becomes a reality in which we dwell.

A renewed mind confronts the mindsets influenced by evil, transforming them into a heavenly reality. It proves the will of God not just in word but in deed. It frees those enslaved to sin, brings joy where there was sadness, strength where there was weakness, brings wholeness to our spirits, souls, and bodies, and releases creative expression and innovations. It causes the Kingdom of God to be expressed "on earth as it is in heaven."

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*End of Lesson 403*

## Recommended Resources:

1. Audio Message: "The Gospel" December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2011, by Bill Johnson
2. Audio Message: "Old Testament vs. New Testament" July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2010, by Kris Vallotton
3. Book: "When Heaven Invades Earth" by Bill Johnson
4. Book: "Time to Weep: Discover the Power of Repentance that Brings Revival" by Steven Hill.
5. Book: "Repent and Believe" by Derek Prince
6. Book: "True and False Repentance" by Charles Finney

Copies of some of these resources can be obtained through:

Sound Wisdom

933 College View Drive

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email: [customerservice@ibethel.org](mailto:customerservice@ibethel.org)

Customer Service Phone #: 1-530-246-6000