

Student Leaders,

This year during Lent, we would love to have you leading conversation in your small groups! You are such a vital part of your groups and YOU make such a difference in the lives of our confirmation students!

Each confirmation student and student leader has been mailed a copy of this year's Lenten devotional book "Lent's Intense!" which will be the basis for our small group discussion. We are encouraging all confirmation students/guides/student leaders to use the daily Lenten devotional as we travel through Lent together.

On Wednesday evenings during Lent, you will have a short outline which will include a piece of scripture and 5-6 questions for your small group. Each week has a different theme...and we're hoping people can be creative in thinking about how to incorporate your own images into the theme!

Word/Theme of the Week	Week of	Submit photos by
<i>Dust</i>	Wednesday, Feb. 17	Saturday, Feb. 20
<i>Reflect</i>	Wednesday, Feb. 24	Saturday, Feb. 27
<i>Broken</i>	Wednesday, March 3	Saturday, March 6
<i>Costly</i>	Wednesday, March 10	Saturday, March 13
<i>Beloved</i>	Wednesday, March 17	Saturday, March 20
<i>Cry</i>	Wednesday, March 24	Saturday, March 27
Love *March 31 st is Spring break & during Holy Week – No Confirmation		

Bring the Word of the Week to life!

Each Wednesday, beginning with Ash Wednesday (Feb. 17th), we invite you to post an image on your social media with the hashtag **#REthinkILC** (or email us a copy) that helps you connect or unpack the meaning of that word. This is an opportunity to connect and engage with our Lenten themes via a visual medium and help others to also contemplate (rethink) these themes during Lent.

How this will work:

- Post your photos on your social media channel with the hashtag, **#REthinkILC**, or send your photos to kelly@immanuel.us.
- Please submit them by noon on Saturday (so Kelly has time to create a collage of images that will be shared in worship on Sunday).
- The collages will also be shared on Immanuel's Facebook and Instagram pages.

Schedule during Lent

6:00-6:20pm REfuel
6:20-6:50pm Confirmation Small Groups via ZOOM
7:00pm Holden Evening Prayer (no in-person worship)

February 17th (Ash Wednesday)

Theme: **Dust**

Ash Wednesday starts out with an admission. You (and I) are DUST: sin-stained and filthy, destined for DEATH. The dark mark on your forehead (ashes in the shape of a cross) makes the fact undeniable. That is, in a word, INTENSE.

Let's spend some intentional time this intense season to look back (past tense) on what brought us to this reality. And then let's focus on what our intensely loving God has done – and continues to do (present tense) – to ensure that those dark, incriminating marks are erased (future tense) eternally!

“...by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return” Genesis 3:19.

We all know that at some point, we will die. We often avoid talking about such topics or quickly move past them if they are brought up. We are often uncomfortable, or we want to be sensitive to those who have experience loss. Death is a hard subject...yet here we are, each Ash Wednesday, reminded that in fact we will all die, and we will return to DUST.

We repeat the words from Genesis each year as we begin the season of Lent, because in this season we are invited to reflect on, and repent of, our sin. We remember our own mortality because of sin, and we confess the suffering that sin causes us and others. In repentance we seek to live new and different lives, turning from sin as we are inspired by God's love and empowered by God's grace. We remember those we love who have suffered death, and even as we grieve death, we reach out again for the sure and certain comfort and new life we have in Jesus Christ.

- 1) When you hear the words from Genesis 3:19, what images come to mind?
- 2) Thinking about returning to DUST, I'm reminded of our short time on earth. How do you stay present in the gift that is “this moment” without being consumed by all the unknowns in the world and in life?
- 3) How do you live out your faith daily? What does living out your faith every day mean to you?
- 4) We know we are journeying to the cross in Lent, but the story doesn't end at the cross. What gives you hope right now?
- 5) What helps you deepen your faith, especially now during times of isolation?
- 6) During Lent this year, what can our small group do to grow deeper?
- 7) How can we pray for one another this week? Please share prayer requests.

February 24th

Theme: *Reflect*

A necessary step in the work of repentance is reflection, a rethinking of our past actions and attitudes. Have our words and actions been good and acceptable and perfect? Where have we fallen short of who we would like to be, of who we believe God created us to be? Where can our love be more genuine, and how might we turn from evil and hold tighter to all that is good? As you take time to reflect on your life, invite God to help you be renewed in faith, hope, and love! Even more, picture what that might look like in your life, and then resolve to bring that picture to life.

***"I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."* Romans 12:1-2, 9-18.**

- 1) Do you enjoy having time to slow down and reflect on things...or would you rather keep busy and moving? Why?
- 2) Think about some of the people you are in close relationship with...maybe a family member, friends, etc...
 - a. As you reflect on life over the last 11 months, during the pandemic, how have they handled the added stress?
 - b. Have you been able to support them in any way? If yes, how have you supported them?
 - c. Who has supported you during this time? Do you feel like you have enough support?
- 3) Sometimes we have too much time to sit and reflect on things! This is often not helpful...but a reality of where we are in a pandemic. How do you ***"hold fast to what is good"*** from our Romans text, and not be dragged down by negative things?
- 4) It's good to pause and reflect at times, but we also need to take action! What is one thing you are doing this Lenten season to help you focus on what Jesus did for us on the cross? Did you give up something for Lent? Did you take on a new faith practice for Lent?
- 5) How can we pray for one another this week? Please share prayer requests.

March 3rd

Theme: Broken

Broken: having been fractured or damaged and no longer in one piece or in working order; having given up all hope; despairing.

One way to look at sin is that it leaves us broken. This brokenness is personal, caused by the pain and shame of our bad choices or behavior. This brokenness is also relational when our selfish words or actions hurt others, causing us to no longer be united with each other or with God. This brokenness can indeed lead to despair. Part of the work of repentance is to recognize what is broken in our lives and to seek to be made whole through God's love and grace in Christ.

In the 6th Chapter of Romans, the Apostle Paul writes: ***"What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? ...Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. No longer present yourselves to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present yourselves wholly to God as instruments of righteousness."***

- 1) Think of one relationship in your life that is "broken" or in need of repair. Have you prayed about this relationship? Have you prayed for the other person? Why/why not?
- 2) There are things that are obvious and very easy to see when they are broken (like a cracked windshield) and other things that although broken, can slip by undetected unless you really dig deep (like anxiety).
 - a. What do you think are some of the "undetected" broken things that students your age deal with?
 - b. Who do you know that has worked through brokenness? What did it look like for them?
- 3) When do we notice other people's brokenness? When do people notice our brokenness?
- 4) We often see brokenness as weakness. God sees our brokenness as an opportunity. It is in our brokenness that we can often relate to people who are hurting in new and unexpected ways.
 - a. Can you think of a time when you were really sad or hurting? Who helped you in those moments or in that time? What did it feel like for someone to walk alongside you in that pain?
- 5) Why do you think it's hard for people to share or talk about their brokenness?
- 6) How can you care for the members of your small group, friend circle, or family that may be going through a rough time?
 - a. Think of someone you know that is having a hard time right now. Make a plan to reach out to them in some way and let them know you care about them.

March 10th

Theme: *Costly*

How much does it cost? A question that might be asked when trying to figure out the value of something. The costliest things in life aren't things. It is relationships that demand the most from us, and their value is determined by our willingness to pay the price for attending to those relationships and keeping them healthy and strong. Another way to say this is that love costs! Love costs us our time, our effort, our attention; our investment in these gifts blesses our relationships.

Perhaps no bible passage states this as well as Paul's words from Philippians 2: ***"If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death."*** Christ died so we might live, and so that we might know how much God loves us. And real love is costly; love calls us to hold on, to humbly seek and generously offer forgiveness. Love calls us to serve those we love with our best gifts, just as Christ has served us.

- 1) Have you ever saved up your money to buy something? What were you saving for? How long did it take you to save up enough to buy it?
- 2) Have you ever broken something that you then tried to fix.. but in the end, it couldn't be fixed? What happened?
- 3) I was once hiking on a trail and I ran out of water! I was so thirsty and all I could think about was the \$1 bottle of water I decided not to buy at the store right before I started hiking. I didn't want to spend the extra money! When I was thirsty, out on the trail, I would have gladly paid \$5 for that same bottle of water!
 - a. Our perception of what is costly can often change when we are presented with new situations or facts. Talk about the following items and how their value may have changed.
 - i. Going to school everyday (February 2020) **vs.** logging onto your computer for class
 - ii. Gathering w/ friends @ their house **vs.** socially distanced gathering w/ masks
 - iii. Family time (Feb. 2020) **vs.** family time during the pandemic (grandparents?)
- 4) I don't think we can ever know how costly it was for God to send his only son, Jesus, to us and then be put to death on the cross. Jesus died on the cross to save us. It was done out of love for us.
 - a. How can we describe the type of love required for Jesus' sacrifice for us?
 - b. How can we respond to such a costly gift?
- 5) Who has made an extra effort in your life to make sure you knew you were loved & important?
- 6) How do you show the people that are important to you, that they are loved and important?

March 17th

Theme: **BELOVED**

We tend not to use fancy language like “beloved” in our everyday speech. Do you remember the last time you may have called someone your beloved?

Beloved refers to one who is not just loved, but much loved, one who is precious and adored. When we look upon someone as precious and adored, we are inspired to go out of our way to care for them, bless them, help them, and ensure they know they are loved!

When someone is beloved, we love them with our whole life. This is how Jesus loves us, with his whole life; Jesus loved us enough to pay that price. As John 3:16 proclaims, “***For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not die but have eternal life.***” We are beloved of God, and Jesus invites us to love one another like that! This is our highest purpose, our reason for being, to love one another as God loves us. Beloved, let us love one another!

- 1) When was the last time you used the word love? How often do you use the word love?
- 2) Fill in the blank: I love _____
 - a. Pizza
 - b. Cat videos
 - c. Tacos
 - d. My friends!
 - e. All of the above
- 3) How often could you substitute the word **beloved** (much loved/precious/adored) in the context you usually use the word love?
 - a. Often
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. Never
- 4) We are God’s beloved children. It’s true! YOU are that special! How do you feel, knowing God sees YOU this way?
- 5) God calls us to love one another in the same way that we are loved. This is challenging to say the least! How do you remind yourself that you are called to *Love our neighbor*?
- 6) What part of loving your neighbor comes easily for you? What part of loving your neighbor is hard for you?
- 7) Take a moment to share a blessing with the members of your small group. Have them make the sign of the cross on their forehead, reminding them that they are a baptized, **BELOVED**, child of God!
 - a. Being reminded of this promise, how are we being called to act in the world?

March 24th

Theme: *Cry*

What makes you cry? When is the last time you cried? We can cry with joy and gratitude when something happens that changes our life for good. We might cry with frustration when things don't go our way, or when life is unfair. We cry with empathy as we feel the pain of another and are moved to respond with comfort and concern. Of course, we cry in pain when we are wounded, perhaps in the hope that someone might hear and come to our aid. We cry from grief when loss is overwhelming.

Jesus cried. He cried as he grieved the death of his beloved friend Lazarus, just as we cry at the death of our loved ones. He cried even knowing that he could and would raise Lazarus from the dead, because even though things might turn out all right in the end, that does not mean we don't grieve the sad moments along the way. Jesus cried out in the garden as he prayed that God might spare him from his own death, and Jesus cried out on the cross, once for forgiveness for those who crucified him, and once because he felt forsaken in that moment.

This is the measure of God's love in Christ. God will suffer with us, cry with us, share our pains, our griefs, our fears, our heartaches. But God shares our tears with this purpose, that we might endure our pains and find healing, that we might last the long nights of grief and troubles and find joy in the morning. May this be comfort for our cries, that God is with us. God not only hears our cries but cries with us, and God will wipe away our tears and bring us new hope and fresh joy.

- 1) Did you know there were so many examples of Jesus crying? What does this tell us about Jesus?
- 2) We all have emotions, although we are often encouraged not to share them or rewarded when we don't. What can we learn from Jesus' example?
- 3) This last year has been a hard one in so many ways...loss of "normal"...school...mental health issues...job losses...death of loved ones...pandemic... You name it, 2020 had it! How have you dealt with all the uncertainty and loss? What's helped you get through the hard times?
- 4) Have you had a moment where you questioned God as to why all of this was happening?
- 5) Difficulties and losses in life can be overwhelming. As we learn to navigate these situations, we gain resiliency for the future. If we can make it through the pandemic, we can make it through anything! If Jesus' followers can see the resurrected Christ and not dwell on those horrible moments leading up to the cross, they too can experience a newness of life.
 - a. Over the last year, what were some moments when you realized you were stronger than you thought you were?
 - b. When did you experience moments where you knew you needed help?
 - c. What have you learned about yourself over the last year?
- 6) We can bring our whole selves to God...our broken, emotional, imperfect, perfectness!
 - a. Take a few minutes to affirm each member of your small group for all they bring to the group and the ways they created in God's image.