

SESSION 5

WORK THROUGH CONFLICT



How do you handle
tough situations?

THE POINT

Leaders deal with conflict using straightforward communication.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

The nations of Chile and Argentina were close to war at the beginning of the 20th century. Fortunately, leaders from both countries came up with a peaceful resolution. In honor of that agreement, both nations erected a statue in 1904 called *Christ the Redeemer of the Andes*. The 23-foot tall statue was carried in pieces by mules up the Andes Mountains, where it still sits 12,500 feet above sea level. The statue also includes a plaque with the following inscription in Spanish: “Sooner shall these mountains crumble to dust than Chile and Argentina shall break this peace which at the feet of Christ the Redeemer they have sworn to maintain.”¹

Conflict happens, but what ultimately causes the most damage is mishandling conflict. You’ll probably never build a statue to commemorate the end of a conflict. But you can always handle conflict with clear communication—and always bring glory to God.

The Book of Joshua helps us see how to do that through another story of two conflicting groups facing each other across their own borders.

The plaque that was added to Christ the Redeemer of the Andes wasn’t added until 1937—33 years after the statue was erected²



WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Joshua 22:11-12,15-18,26-27,33-34

¹¹ Then the Israelites heard it said, "Look, the Reubenites, Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh have built an altar on the frontier of the land of Canaan at the region of the Jordan, on the Israelite side." ¹² When the Israelites heard this, the entire Israelite community assembled at Shiloh to go to war against them.

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¹⁵ They went to the Reubenites, Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh, in the land of Gilead, and told them, ¹⁶ "This is what the LORD's entire community says: 'What is this treachery you have committed today against the God of Israel by turning away from the LORD and building an altar for yourselves, so that you are in rebellion against the LORD today? ¹⁷ Wasn't the sin of Peor, which brought a plague on the LORD's community, enough for us, so that we have not cleansed ourselves from it even to this day, ¹⁸ and now, you would turn away from the LORD? If you rebel against the LORD today, tomorrow He will be angry with the entire community of Israel.

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²⁶ "Therefore we said: Let us take action and build an altar for ourselves, but not for burnt offering or sacrifice. ²⁷ Instead, it is to be a witness between us and you, and between the generations after us, so that we may carry out the worship of the LORD in His presence with our burnt offerings, sacrifices, and fellowship offerings. Then in the future, your descendants will not be able to say to our descendants, 'You have no share in the LORD!' "

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³³ The Israelites were pleased with the report, and they praised God. They spoke no more about going to war against them to ravage the land where the Reubenites and Gadites lived. ³⁴ So the Reubenites and Gadites named the altar: It is a witness between us that the LORD is God.



The Setting

Two and a half of Israel's tribes had requested from Moses and been granted their portion of territory on the east side of Jordan with the stipulation that the fighting men from these tribes help their brothers conquer Canaan. With the promised land largely under the control of the Israelites, these fighting men were released to return to their families and land east of Jordan. Misunderstanding between them and the rest of Israel nearly resulted in civil war.



How do you typically respond when people accuse you of something?

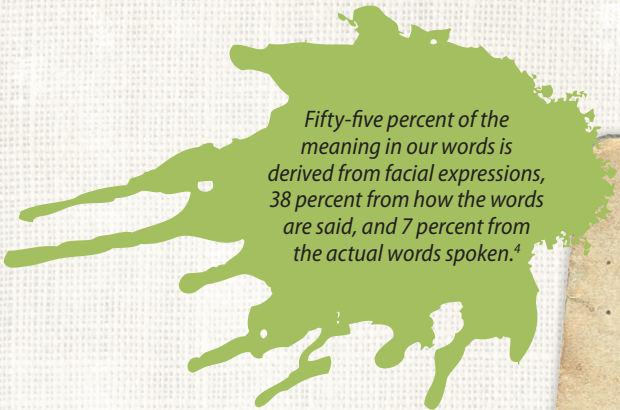
JOSHUA 22:11-12,15-18

For the moment, God's people had a break. The tribes of Reuben and Gad along with half the tribe of Manasseh wanted to settle east of the Jordan River. Joshua granted their request. However, before they crossed the Jordan, these tribes stopped to build an altar—an altar no one could miss.

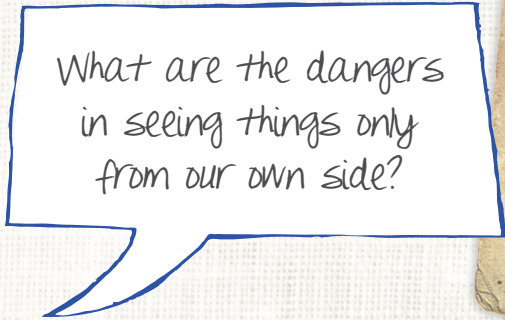
The tribes west of the Jordan were ready to go to war against their own people. They thought the altar was a sign of rebellion. They assumed it was an altar to a false god. But before a war broke out, the Israelites sent a delegate to deliver a message to the tribes east of the Jordan. Their concern was that their family was reverting to old ways—worshiping idols they had worshiped in the past. These leaders made a case for their concern by revisiting the history of the people. They were so concerned about the spiritual status of their brothers and sisters that they invited the two and a half tribes to move across the river and join them if their own land was filled with ungodly influences (see Josh. 22:19). Their ultimate desire and aim was for a godly resolution, not war or division.

When we face difficult situations, especially situations involving conflict, we should approach them out of genuine love and a desire to serve the other party, not out of a desire to win the argument.

Though the old song says the River Jordan is "deep and wide," the modern river is neither. In places it's more like a creek than a river—less than ten meters across and two meters deep.³



Fifty-five percent of the meaning in our words is derived from facial expressions, 38 percent from how the words are said, and 7 percent from the actual words spoken.⁴



What are the dangers in seeing things only from our own side?

Look Out for Others

Jesus calls us to take an interest in others, but this doesn't always come naturally. We have to be intentional about thinking of others first. One way we can do this is by knowing what the Bible says about caring for others. Read Philippians 2:3-4. Write out this verse below and commit to memorizing it this week.

JOSHUA 22:26-27

The Israelite leaders who lived on the west side of the Jordan River and the Israelites on the east side of the Jordan wanted the same thing. Clearly, they had been misunderstood. Their solution was to build another altar to serve as a monument to their loyalty to both God and His people. By building the altar, it was their hope that others who saw it would recognize it as a witness between all the Israelites to the faithfulness of the two and a half tribes and their unwillingness to rebel against the Lord.

It is interesting that both sides wanted the same thing. Both groups wanted to be unified in their loyalty to God, but they only realized that when they listened to one another.

To lead others well in conflict, we must listen with our hearts and minds—not just hear words—to understand what's underneath and then be able to see the change needed. When we truly listen to others, we show that we care about them and their fears, hurts, and desires. We demonstrate love toward others by allowing them to clearly express themselves and their feelings so that we can better understand them.

Taking time to listen avoids rushed conclusions. Leading through listening leads to a godly resolution, and in so doing, we honor Christ.

JOSHUA 22:33-34

When the Israelite leaders heard the underlying reason the two and a half tribes built the altar, they embraced it as good news. The initial confrontation that led them to listen, allowed them to realize that their accusation was wrong. Once they realized this, they declared the truth and celebrated their unity. The Israelite delegation returned home and told the people the good news. The people rejoiced. Worship replaced war in the hearts of the people.

As you work through disagreements or misunderstandings, remember that God desires for people to worship Him. Trust Him and step out in faith so that His power will bring about the good of those He loves while bringing Him glory at the same time. As you lead, make it your aim not to simply walk through conflict, but to do so in a way that all people witness our great God at work in and through you.

What are the signs of a conflict that has been resolved well?

What can we do to make certain a conflict is resolved both now and for the future?

'First keep the peace
within yourself, then you
can also bring peace
to others.'¹⁵

—THOMAS À KEMPIS

APPLY IT

How can clear communication with others be a part of your life during times of conflict? Use these suggestions as a way to get ready:

- ▶ **Listen.** As you listen to others this week, don't respond with your own words. Repeat back to them a summary of what they've said so they know you really did listen. Relationships are strengthened when others know they've been heard.
- ▶ **Affirm.** Reach out to someone you've had conflict with in the past: a note, a letter, a phone call, a text, or even a small gift.
- ▶ **Confront.** If there's unresolved conflict in your relationships, confront the problem directly, lovingly, and patiently. Take time first to pray and ask God to give you direction and courage.

You'll probably never build a statue or inscribe a plaque to commemorate the end of a conflict. But you can always handle conflict with clear communication—and always bring glory to God.



Only by His Power

The Lord told Moses to send men to scout out the land of Canaan. The report of the land was favorable, but the Israelites would undoubtedly face hardship in order to gain access.



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THE ART OF LISTENING

James 1:19

Conflict is inevitable, but it doesn't have to ruin a friendship. Mishandling conflict is often the destroyer of relationships. The Bible teaches us that knowing how to listen can keep us from conflict. Spend some time this week reading: James 1:19; Proverbs 12:15; Proverbs 21:23; Proverbs 17:27; and Colossians 3:12. Choose one to memorize, and write it below.



I'M SORRY

Proverbs 4:19

No one enjoys saying, "I'm sorry." But a real leader admits when he or she has done something wrong. One of the great challenges in straightforward communication is admitting that we've made a mistake. You will make mistakes throughout your life, and some of your mistakes may hurt others or cause conflict. Write down the names of people with whom you have unresolved conflict. Across from each person's name, write a brief explanation of the conflict. Once you've made your list, be intentional this week about resolving these conflicts.

Name

Conflict

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