The Point
Leaders deal with conflict using straightforward communication.

The Bible Meets Life
War breaks out when people or nations disagree on borders. The nations of Chile and Argentina were close to just such a war at the beginning of the 20th century. Fortunately, they came up with a peaceful resolution. In honor of their agreement, they erected a statue that still stands today. 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 Passage
Joshua 22:11-12,15-18,26-27,33-34
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.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

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

11 And the people of Israel heard it said, “Behold, the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh have built the altar at the frontier of the land of Canaan, in the region about the Jordan, on the side that belongs to the people of Israel.” 12 And when the people of Israel heard of it, the whole assembly of the people of Israel gathered at Shiloh to make war against them.

15 And they came to the people of Reuben, the people of Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, in the land of Gilead, and they said to them,

16 “Thus says the whole congregation of the Lord, ’What is this breach of faith that you have committed against the God of Israel in turning away this day from following the Lord by building yourselves an altar this day in rebellion against the Lord? Have we not had enough of the sin at Peor from which even yet we have not cleansed ourselves, and for which there came a plague upon the congregation of the Lord, 18 that you too must turn away this day from following the Lord? And if you too rebel against the Lord today then tomorrow he will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel.

26 Therefore we said, ‘Let us now build an altar, not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice, but to be a witness between us and you, and between our generations after us, that we do perform the service of the Lord in his presence with our burnt offerings and sacrifices and peace offerings, so your children will not say to our children in time to come, “You have no portion in the Lord.”’

33 And the report was good in the eyes of the people of Israel. And the people of Israel blessed God and spoke no more of making war against them to destroy the land where the people of Reuben and the people of Gad were settled. 34 The people of Reuben and the people of Gad called the altar Witness, “For,” they said, “it is a witness between us that the Lord is God.”
GET INTO THE STUDY

ENGAGE: Begin the session with one or more of the Engage Options on the next page. (This is optional. If you’d rather skip the Engage Options, just begin with the first discussion question.)

SAY: Handling difficult situations and resolving conflict require clear communication. It can be easy to misread someone’s intentions or motives when we look at things from our own perspective and experience. But when both sides talk, conflicts are resolved.

GUIDE: Call attention to The Point. Explain that this is the key idea to keep in mind throughout the session.

THE POINT

 Leaders deal with conflict using straightforward communication.

READ: Read and summarize The Bible Meets Life for your group.

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.” 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.

DISCUSS: Ask students the question, “How do you handle tough situations?”

PRAY: Transition into the session by praying that students would see the importance of looking at both sides of a situation and responding honestly when working to resolve conflict.
Engage Options

► Lead with Action
Invite students to reflect on a time in which they were involved in a conflict and it was resolved successfully. Have them jot down the reasons they think the conflict was resolved. Invite volunteers to share their experiences. Say, “In times of conflict, leaders emerge. Though it is difficult, conflict is best dealt with using open and honest communication. Avoiding conversations or people only makes things worse. Leaders approach conflict with sensitivity to everyone involved and a focus on intentional communication.”

► Lead with Atmosphere
In various seats around the room, place “Conflict Cards”—notecards that contain a conflict scenario. Have students read them aloud and work together to come up with a solution to the problem. Say, “Sometimes the right solution is clear. Other times, it isn’t so obvious. When we face times of conflict, the best route always involves straightforward communication. There are many examples of this throughout Scripture.”

► Lead with Media
Show a clip from the TV show “Undercover Boss,” where a boss reveals his or her true identity and confronts an employee about a conflict. Say, “The best way to deal with conflict is through straightforward communication. Though it can be uncomfortable, it is important to lead with honesty and openness in times of conflict.”

OPTION: Divide the room into two sections. When students arrive have them choose a side. When you begin group time, explain that they are now on two separate teams. They need to come up with a team name and reason their team is better than the other team. Appoint a “conflict resolver” for each side to refute the reasons why one team is better.

OPTION: Search the Internet for a video titled, “Duel of the Dishes” and use it as an example of how NOT to handle conflict.
The Point: Leaders deal with conflict using straightforward communication.

Joshua 22:11-12, 15-18

Say: 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.

Guide: Help students understand that in every conflict we face, we should be willing to do whatever is necessary to reach a godly resolution.

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.

Read: Ask a volunteer to read the following:

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.

Discuss: Lead students to discuss the question, “How do you typically respond when people accuse you of something?”

—Joshua 22:11-12, 15-18
[Verses 11-12] The Israelites had experienced several times the negative consequences of ungodly behavior during the period between the exodus from Egypt and taking possession of the promised land. When the nine-and-a-half tribes dwelling in Canaan (the Cisjordan) heard that the two-and-a-half tribes living on the eastern side of the Jordan River (the Transjordan) had built a “large, impressive altar” (v. 10), they assumed those tribes had committed religious apostasy. The Cisjordan tribes didn’t want to suffer God’s wrath as they had at Ai due to Achan’s sin (see Josh. 7). So the entire Israelite community, meaning the nine-and-a-half tribes in the land of Canaan, assembled for war. The tribes assembled at Shiloh, an early religious center for Israel in the promised land. The purpose of the Shiloh assembly was to go to war against them.

[Verses 15-16] The delegation consisting of Phinehas, the son of the high priest, and one leader from each of the nine and a half tribes went to the Reubenites, Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh. The meeting took place somewhere in the land of Gilead, a region approximately 50 miles long and 20 miles wide, northeast of the Dead Sea. The delegation from the nine-and-a-half tribes confronted the two-and-a-half tribes with a clear accusation that showed unanimity: “this is what the Lord’s entire community says.” The accusation revealed their interpretation of the altar as treachery committed against the God of Israel. The term treachery, from the Hebrew maal, referred to any act deemed as unfaithfulness.

[Verse 17] The reference to the sin of Peor was a reminder of the negative consequences of apostasy. Near Peor, a mountain in Moab, a group from among the twelve tribes camped in the plains of Moab had committed apostasy by having sexual relations with pagan women and worshiping their gods, particularly Baal of Peor. The Lord’s judgment against this apostasy came in the form of a plague that claimed the lives of 24,000 offenders (see Num. 25). The statement “we have not cleansed ourselves from it even to this day” revealed how deeply the devastating plague at Peor had been seared on the minds of the Israelites.

[Verse 18] The delegation asked the Transjordan tribes if, in spite of the disaster at Peor, “now, you would turn away from the Lord?” The question was followed by a warning: “If you rebel against the Lord today, tomorrow He will be angry with the entire community of Israel.” The nine-and-a-half tribes who actually dwelt in the promised land viewed themselves as the true people of God, the entire community of Israel. They did not want to experience another Peor-like plague on account of the perceived apostasy of the two and a half Transjordan tribes. They were afraid, and so they took action to confront what they considered to be rebellion against God.

TIP: Don’t forget to adapt the questions to fit your group. If the questions aren’t connecting, make adjustments to match the personality of your group.
STUDY THE BIBLE
The Point: Leaders deal with conflict using straightforward communication.

JOSHUA 22:26-27
SAY: 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.

SUMMARIZE: Help students see the importance of taking time to listen.

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.

DISCUSS: Lead students to discuss the question, “What are the dangers in seeing things only from our own side?”

DO: Direct students to complete the Action Point, “Look Out for Others.”

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.
Commentary

JOSHUA 22:26-27

In Joshua 22:21-25, the two-and-a-half Transjordan tribes answered the accusations of Phinehas and his delegation. They affirmed, “Yahweh is the God of gods!” (v. 22). They offered themselves for judgment if they had indeed committed apostasy (see vv. 22-23). Then they revealed their true motivation for building the altar: they were concerned their descendants might be cut off from the rest of Israel, and thus induced “to stop fearing the Lord” (vv. 24-25).

[Verse 26] In light of their concern for the spiritual well-being of their descendants and in keeping with their commitment to the Lord, the two-and-a-half Transjordan tribes had decided to build an altar for themselves. From the start, their motive was pure. They never intended the altar to be for burnt offering or sacrifice. Why build an altar if it would never really serve as a place of sacrifice? They wanted to do something tangible to remind the Cisjordan tribes they had done their part in the conquest. Though they chose to live in the Transjordan region, they had fought side by side with their kinsmen to take possession of the Cisjordan country. They also had been confirmed and blessed as faithful by Joshua (see vv. 1-10).

[Verse 27] Thus, the “large, impressive altar” by the Jordan River was merely a “replica of the Lord’s altar” in Shiloh (v. 28). It would serve as a witness between us, the Transjordan tribes, and you, the Cisjordan tribes. The replica altar would also be a witness between future generations of all tribes on both sides of the Jordan. The term witness provided a legal status for the replica altar from the Transjordan perspective. Such a legal witness testified to the truth of the matter.

Their desired goal in establishing such a tangible witness on the banks of the Jordan River was to ensure the Transjordan tribes would have access to carry out the worship of the Lord. Far from being apostate, the Transjordan tribes were acting out of deep faithfulness to the Lord for themselves and for the generations after them. They wanted to guarantee their right to worship the Lord in His presence with burnt offerings, sacrifices, and fellowship offerings. To worship in His presence meant going to Shiloh, to the Lord’s altar before the tent of meeting.

The “large, impressive altar” by the Jordan River would be a witness in the future as well. The descendants of the Cisjordan tribes would not be able to say to the descendants of the Transjordan tribes, “You have no share in the Lord.” By building the replica altar, the Transjordan tribes sought to encourage their descendants to worship Yahweh. They also sought to safeguard their right to worship at the Lord’s altar in the Cisjordan against any possible severing of relationships initiated by the nine-and-a-half Cisjordan tribes in the future.
STUDY THE BIBLE

*The Point:* Leaders deal with conflict using straightforward communication.

**JOSHUA 22:33-34**

**READ:** Ask for a volunteer to read the following:

> 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.

**DISCUSS:** Lead students to discuss the question, “What are the signs of a conflict that has been resolved well?”

**GUIDE:** Help students understand that in handling conflict the right way, God ensures He will bring good to us and glory to Himself.

> 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.

**DISCUSS:** Lead students to discuss the question, “What can we do to make certain a conflict is resolved both now and for the future?”

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33 And the report was good in the eyes of the people of Israel. And the people of Israel blessed God and spoke no more of making war against them to destroy the land where the people of Reuben and the people of Gad were settled. 34 The people of Reuben and the people of Gad called the altar Witness, “For,” they said, “it is a witness between us that the Lord is God.”

—JOSHUA 22:33-34
Commentary

JOSHUA 22:33-34

[Verse 33] When the Israelites, the members of the nine-and-a-half tribes dwelling west of the Jordan River, heard the delegation’s report, they were pleased. Phinehas and the other tribal leaders had effectively alleviated any sense of impropriety on the part of the two-and-a-half Transjordan tribes regarding the “large, impressive altar” they had built.

No longer fearful of divine judgment or the need to fight their own kinsmen, they praised God. What had begun as a crisis headed toward a war had become, through clear communication, an occasion to worship God. This clear communication had several stages. First, Phinehas and his delegation clearly communicated their concerns regarding the “large, impressive altar” to the Transjordan tribes. Second, the Transjordan tribes clearly communicated their actual motivation and intention for the altar. Finally, the Shiloh delegation returned to the region west of the Jordan River and clearly communicated what they had learned to the full nine-and-a-half tribes. The result was heartfelt worship and praise of God. The threat of bloodshed was averted and many human lives were spared. The cost of the time needed to clarify the situation was well worth paying.

When they praised God, they also chose a solution that honored Him. First, they honored God by speaking no more about going to war against them to ravage the land where the Reubenites and Gadites lived.

[Verse 34] Second, the tribes in the region east of the Jordan River honored God by naming the altar “It is a witness between us that the Lord is God.” Though only a replica of the altar of the Lord at Shiloh, the altar by the Jordan River served an important purpose. It reminded all concerned that the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh dwelling east of the Jordan had done their duty in fighting alongside their kinsmen to take possession of the promised land. Therefore, they deserved full privileges for themselves and their descendants in terms of rights of access to the Lord’s altar at Shiloh.

The nine-and-a-half Cisjordan tribes misjudged the meaning and intent of the “large, impressive altar” that the Transjordan tribes had built. To their credit, they did not act immediately upon their assumptions. Instead, they sought clarification and found the correct solution. As a direct result of clear communication, the leaders found a peaceful resolution to the conflict. All of God’s people were then able to praise and honor Him together. Even more, the “large, impressive altar” was there as a perpetual reminder that the future generations of Transjordan tribal members had the right to worship God and to sacrifice on the Lord’s altar at Shiloh.

TIP: This may be another opportunity for you to get to know your group and your group to get to know you. Discuss a few personal stories where conflict was handled successfully or poorly.
APPLY IT

ASK: How can clear communication with others be a part of your life during times of conflict?

READ: Ask for a volunteer to read aloud a few ways students can take what they have learned and Apply It.

- **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.

GUIDE: Lead students to consider which of the three suggested responses to the Bible study most closely applies to them and their current circumstances.

ASK: Which of these responses do you personally need to focus on most as you live this session out? Allow time for responses.

WRAP UP

PRAY: Close in prayer, asking God to help students remember that in choosing to handle conflict with clear communication, they will always bring glory to God.

ASK: Ask students about last week’s Live It Out options. Discuss any responses and encourage students as they choose to apply the Bible to their lives.

GUIDE: Encourage students to complete one or both of the Live It Out activities for the week. Let them know you will discuss them the next time you meet.

For **free online training** on how to lead a group visit
MinistryGrid.com/web/BibleStudiesForLife
LEADER LIVE IT OUT

**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.

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ONE CONVERSATION™

**THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE:** War breaks out when people or nations disagree on borders. The nations of Chile and Argentina were close to just such a war at the beginning of the 20th century. Fortunately, they came up with a peaceful resolution. In honor of their agreement, they erected a statue that still stands today. 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.

**STUDENTS**

**THE POINT:** Leaders deal with conflict using straightforward communication.

- When have you seen conflict mishandled?
- Why is it important to see the other person’s side?

Discuss this quote: “First keep the peace within yourself, then you can also bring peace to others.” — Thomas à Kempis


**LIVE IT OUT:** Your student has been encouraged to do one or both Live It Out activities in the Personal Study Guide. Here are some suggested ways to help your student:

*If he or she plans to complete The Art of Listening:*

- Spend some time this week reading what the Bible says about the importance of knowing how to listen.

*If he or she plans to do I’m Sorry:*

- Tell your student about a moment in your life when you had a hard time saying, “I’m sorry.”
- Talk with your student about relationships in his or her life where there is unresolved conflict. Encourage him or her to make time this week to resolve those conflicts.