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22 Then Joshua summoned the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh ² and said to them, "You have done all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded, and you have obeyed me in everything I commanded. ³ For a long time now—to this very day—you have not deserted your fellow Israelites but have carried out the mission the LORD your God gave you. ⁴ Now that the LORD your God has given them rest as he promised, return to your homes in the land that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side of the Jordan. ⁵ But be very careful to keep the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you: to love the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to keep his commands, to hold fast to him and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul." ⁶ Then Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went to their homes. ⁷ (To the half-tribe of Manasseh Moses had given land in Bashan, and to the other half of the tribe Joshua gave land on the west side of the Jordan along with their fellow Israelites.) When Joshua sent them home, he blessed them, ⁸ saying, "Return to your homes with your great wealth—with large herds of livestock, with silver, gold, bronze and iron, and a great quantity of clothing—and divide the plunder from your enemies with your fellow Israelites."

⁹ So the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh left the Israelites at Shiloh in Canaan to return to Gilead, their own land, which they had acquired in accordance with the command of the LORD through Moses. ¹⁰ When they came to Geliath near the Jordan in the land of Canaan, the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh built an imposing altar there by the Jordan. ¹¹ And when the Israelites heard that they had built the altar on the border of Canaan at Geliath near the Jordan on the Israelite side, ¹² the whole assembly of Israel gathered at Shiloh to go to war against them. ¹³ So the Israelites sent Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, to the land of Gilead—to Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh. ¹⁴ With him they sent ten of the chief men, one from each of the tribes of Israel, each the head of a family division among the Israelite clans.

¹⁵ When they went to Gilead—to Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh—they said to them: ¹⁶ "The whole assembly of the LORD says: 'How could you break faith with the God of Israel like this? How could you turn away from the LORD and build yourselves an altar in rebellion against him now? ¹⁷ Was not the sin of Peor enough for us? Up to this very day we have not cleansed ourselves from that sin, even though a plague fell on the community of the LORD! ¹⁸ And are you now turning away from the LORD? "'If you rebel against the LORD today, tomorrow he will be angry with the whole community of Israel. ¹⁹ If the land you possess is defiled, come over to the LORD's land, where the LORD's tabernacle stands, and share the land with us. But do not rebel against the LORD or against us by building an altar for yourselves, other than the altar of the LORD our God. ²⁰ When Achan son of Zerah was unfaithful in regard to the devoted things, did not wrath come on the whole community of Israel? He was not the only one who died for his sin.'" ²¹ Then Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh replied to the heads of the clans of Israel: ²² "The Mighty One, God, the LORD! The Mighty One, God, the LORD! He knows! And let Israel know! If this has been in rebellion or disobedience to the LORD, do not spare us this day. ²³ If we have built our own altar to turn away from the LORD and to offer burnt offerings and grain offerings, or to sacrifice fellowship offerings on it, may the LORD himself call us to account.

²⁴ "No! We did it for fear that some day your descendants might say to ours, 'What do you have to do with the LORD, the God of Israel? ²⁵ The LORD has made the Jordan a boundary between us and you—you Reubenites and Gadites! You have no share in the LORD.' So your descendants might cause ours to stop fearing the LORD. ²⁶ "That is why we said, 'Let us get ready and build an altar—but not for burnt offerings or sacrifices.' ²⁷ On the contrary, it is to be a witness between us and you and

the generations that follow, that we will worship the LORD at his sanctuary with our burnt offerings, sacrifices and fellowship offerings. Then in the future your descendants will not be able to say to ours, 'You have no share in the LORD.' ²⁸ "And we said, 'If they ever say this to us, or to our descendants, we will answer: Look at the replica of the LORD's altar, which our ancestors built, not for burnt offerings and sacrifices, but as a witness between us and you.' ²⁹ "Far be it from us to rebel against the LORD and turn away from him today by building an altar for burnt offerings, grain offerings and sacrifices, other than the altar of the LORD our God that stands before his tabernacle."

³⁰ When Phinehas the priest and the leaders of the community—the heads of the clans of the Israelites—heard what Reuben, Gad and Manasseh had to say, they were pleased. ³¹ And Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, said to Reuben, Gad and Manasseh, "Today we know that the LORD is with us, because you have not been unfaithful to the LORD in this matter. Now you have rescued the Israelites from the LORD's hand." ³² Then Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, and the leaders returned to Canaan from their meeting with the Reubenites and Gadites in Gilead and reported to the Israelites. ³³ They were glad to hear the report and praised God. And they talked no more about going to war against them to devastate the country where the Reubenites and the Gadites lived.

³⁴ And the Reubenites and the Gadites gave the altar this name: A Witness Between Us—that the LORD is God.

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Have you ever heard the phrase, "Perception is 90 percent of reality"? You ever heard that? It's kinda true. I think it is. I think the reality is, a lot of us make decisions -- people come to conclusions based on perceptions. What they see. And I've often lived with that. As a leader, you realize -- it's like, not everyone kind of researches and looks, and more than a few people are willing to kind of like take, if you will, their perception. Here's the problem -- it's true. Perception is 90 percent of reality. That ten percent can be really important sometimes. It can. Because if you're wrong, perception can lead you to disastrous actions.

Joshua was a phenomenal leader. I think he's one of the best in the Bible. Following a hero like Moses -- no one wants to do. It's the hardest thing in the world of leadership assignments. Ask anyone that has tried to follow a Chuck Swindoll or a John MacArthur. That's the reason why Chuck Swindoll's 87 years of age and he's still preaching about 48 weeks a year. Why? Because they can't find anyone to replace him! It's the reason why John MacArthur's 80-some years of age and he's still going. Because -- and we can go down some of the famous guys, like David Jeremiah. They're in their eighties! Why? It's hard to replace people of that kind of stature, and Joshua did it. He followed Moses -- to this day, considered in the Jewish family probably the premier leader. But even Joshua can get it wrong -- when he's willing to make a decision, or come to a conclusion based upon perception.

Today I want to look at this text, and I think it's about as relevant as it comes for our day, because there are a lot of people who are making judgments of each other based upon perception. And it can lead to a lot of hurt and a lot of brokenness. And so, today, we're going to be equipped from the Word of God as to how to be peacemakers in this world, understanding that yes, perception is 90 percent of reality. But that ten percent can be awfully critical, if your perception is wrong.

We start off, Chapter 22, and Joshua is commending some people. I think for leaders, for those of you who lead people, this is a great lesson. When somebody has served faithfully, you can expect high level of service, but make sure you thank them. And Joshua was doing it right. He had two and a half tribes. They are introduced to us at the very beginning -- the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. Who were these individuals? They were kind of a strange group. In a way, they were outcasts, or outsiders, and they've been that way all the way from the very beginning. They made a negotiation with Moses -- this is back 40 years ago, or plus. And they made this relationship with Moses. "Moses, when we get to the Promised Land, we don't need to be inside -- we're kind of outsiders" -- they negotiated their way in -- "but the reality is, we'd like to be on the other side of the Jordan. Not in there with the Promised Land, but right there close to you, we're with you, and if you give us that, we'll fight with you all the way." Now, they had no idea that they were committing themselves to a near 50-year commitment. But they did it. And Joshua understood that a word fulfilled is worthy of commendation. And number one, he told them, "Guys, you stayed with me." Thirty-three different conquests -- 33 different nations that the Nation of Israel conquered, and these guys stayed with them every step of the way.

When you have a person who labors well as a leader, don't back off expectations, but make sure you up your ante of commendation. And Joshua did. He not only did that, but he gave them rest. In other words, "Guys, I want you to go home." Some of these men had not seen their wives in possibly up to ten years -- for sure, seven. They didn't get a TDY -- you know, they didn't go for temporary duty exchange. They didn't get a little furlough. None of that. They were in the trenches fighting with Joshua, nation after nation after nation, and their family was on the other side of the river. They couldn't get back there, and some of them hadn't seen them for a long time, and he said -- at the end of the 33rd conquest, it says, "And then the land rested." And Joshua knew -- "Guys, you need to go home. Some of you haven't seen your moms -- you haven't been with Mom for Mother's Day for years." And you say, "Well, they deserve it." Yeah, they did. But you know, Joshua was still -- what -- domesticating the land. He was still building the infrastructure.

If you go back and look at those individuals who came and kind of homesteaded in this area, or homesteaded in other areas -- I mean, you don't get everything put together in seven years. Not when you're fighting battles. They didn't have a chance to develop things. And so, Joshua, at a great loss to the Nation of Israel, sent these guys home. And not only did he give them rest, but he blessed them. The text just simply says, in verse 6, "Then Joshua blessed them and sent them away." What did he do? He gave them gold and silver and iron. I mean, he went into the attaché case and just started grabbing stuff, and said, "Guys -- we bless you. Thank you! You served us for 33 different conquests. You deserve a rest." And he sent them home.

If that's where the story ended, you'd say, "Way to go, Joshua. Nice leadership. That's what you do to people who have labored well. You commend them, and

you thank them." Text doesn't end there. Starts good. "So the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh left the Israelites" -- I'm in verse 9 -- "and they returned to Gilead, their own land, which they had acquired in accordance with the command of the LORD through Moses." Now, I don't know about you, but - I can tell you straight up. If Joshua was my leader and he said "Go home and see Kerri, you haven't seen her in seven years" -- I am making a beeline. I'm normally a slow person. On that day, I'd be fast. I'd fly. I get to see my wife after seven, eight, nine years! But that's not what they do. The text tells us that -- verse 10 -- "When they came to Gelliloth near the Jordan in the land of Canaan, the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh built an imposing altar there by the Jordan."

Here's where things go south. Why? Because good intentions are often sometimes misunderstood when you make them from a distance. When you make your judgments from a distance, sometimes you don't read it correctly. Joshua had told this nation, "When you leave here, guys -- couple things. Number one, stay straight with God. We've got some situations we're still living with, from Peor, and we're still trying to deal with that, and -- honor God, stay with God, do the right thing. Why? Because whatever happens in your family kinda splashes up." I think every dad ought to have a conversation -- or mom, doesn't matter -- mom, dad, oughta sit down with their kids, especially the guys, and say, "When you leave, you're carrying my name. Don't mess it up. Just don't. I've been working hard at it. And when people think of our name, I want them to think well, and so, don't play with it. You're gonna go out there and mess up, change your name. I'll let you come home, it's okay. I'm not that mean -- close."

Joshua said that. "Guys, you gotta understand. You're a Jewish person. You're in the family of God, and whatever you do can splash back on us, and we can be paying for this for years. Stay true to God." And what's the first thing they do? They cross the Jordan, and within view of the whole Nation of Israel, Joshua -- they built an altar. What did Israel conclude? What did Joshua conclude? Well, he tells us. If you go to verse 16, tells us exactly what they thought when they saw this altar. "The whole assembly of the Lord says, 'How could you break faith with the God of Israel like this?'" Goes on -- "'How could you turn away from the LORD and build yourselves an altar in rebellion against him?'" See, this is now the tenth altar that had been built. One after, you know, Jericho, and one after Ai, and -- so they look over there and they see this altar. Now, they haven't gone over there -- they haven't asked. They make a conclusion. That altar is an altar of rebellion. You've turned away from God, you have brought condemnation on the name of God and upon us, and you're apostate." All of those things they determined by seeing this altar across the river. Now, the danger of that is this: Perception is 90 percent of reality, but sometimes that ten percent's awfully important. Because sometimes it can be wrong.

I remember years ago, back in the early 1900s, reading stories and talking to some people who lived it, that there was a major division in the church in the United States, and it was largely between what they classified as the conservatives. These were people who were committed to the Word of God. These were people who

preached the gospel. They had their slogans -- "Preach the gospel at all costs; preach the gospel." And then there was another group of people, and they were called the liberals. It's not that they didn't go to church; it's not that they didn't use the Bible. But they had their own phrases and their slogans, and their phrases were things like this -- "Empty bellies have no ears." And they were communicating the idea that -- "You know what? Preaching the gospel is important, but if a kid has no food in their stomach and they haven't eaten for a week, it's gonna be hard for them to listen to a Sunday School class. We might want to consider feeding them first."

Now, you may look at that and think -- "Wow! Why can't we do both?" Would've been nice. But in the early 1900s, they weren't willing to do both. At least in the debate. And what happened was, seminaries got split liberal/conservative. Churches got split. President of the seminary that I went to was as conservative as Jesus, but because he believed that the church had a responsibility to the poor, he got branded a social justice guy. He had crosses burnt in his front yard, he had sugar put in every one of his automobiles that ruined them. He was picketed. Because he was the enemy. I got to know Vernon pretty well. Prayed with him when I went to school every day on Thursday. I asked him a question -- "Any of these people that burnt a cross in your front lawn, did any of them make an appointment with you and come in and talk with you? Any of them ask you what you really believe?" And he said, "Not a one of them."

Joshua didn't either. This is not for bad leaders -- great leaders can do this. Good intentions are sometimes misunderstood when we don't really know the heart of a person. And that misunderstanding oftentimes leads to battles and bloodshed. Sometimes real bloodshed. Verse 12 tells us in this text a tragic story. They saw the altar. They conspired the story. They knew what was going on. Apostate people! They're leading a rebellion against God and against the Nation of Israel. These people who we had served with for 40 years are defecting on us! They're traitors! And they need to be killed! And the text tells us in verse 12, "The whole assembly of Israel gathered at Shiloh to go to war against them." Why? Well, sometimes those with a history of fighting are quick to fight again. I think there's actually some people in the world, probably they just like to fight. Joshua had been doing it for seven or eight years. If he saw something he didn't like, he fought. He killed it, he got rid of it. But here's the danger, and here's the warning to all of us. And this is not -- I'm not throwing mud, I'm just simply -- and I'm probably warning myself more than anyone. Those who fight often try to get close to God, and that can be a danger.

Let me explain that. Look at verse 12. In verse 12, it says, "The whole assembly of Israel gathered at Shiloh." Why? Why Shiloh? That's where God was. That's where we heard from God. That's where God directed us. That's where -- that was the meeting place. And when they went there, it was their way of saying, "God is with us." Here's the danger. Sometimes a person who's fighting for God isn't willing to listen to the whole story. Sometimes a person who's passionately fighting for God is so committed to the truth they haven't done the work to find out what a person

really thinks. They make it up in their own mind. "Because I'm fighting for God." There's a danger here, and I want to hear it myself. It's that sometimes we get into situations, and we become defenders of the truth, and we think we know the truth. And we think God's on our side. But here's the danger -- the danger is, those who fight are convinced they know the desires of everyone, and they don't. They don't! This is Joshua -- he's a marvelous leader. But they had come to the conclusion that these guys needed to be killed! A 40-year relationship they were willing to walk away from and destroy them. Why? Because they'd concocted a story that fit with their narrative, if you will. "They're apostate. They need to be killed." Those who fight are convinced they know the desires.

Oh, can we go to verse 21? This is so important. Look at verse 21. Somebody had the brilliant idea to send somebody there. Oh, praise God. They went there to ask them. And they asked the Reubenites, and they asked the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh -- "Hey, what's this altar about? What are you doing?" They told us exactly what they felt, if you look back at verse 16. "How can you do this? Your rebellion -- you're turning against God." But look at verse 21: "Then Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh replied to the heads of the clans of Israel: 'The Mighty One, God, the LORD! The Mighty One, God, the LORD! He knows! And let all Israel know! Let you guys know this. That if this has been in rebellion or disobedience to the LORD, kill us.'" In other words, "If we're building this altar because we're apostate, because we've rejected God and we have built an idol, then you kill us. We're worthy of it. But God is our witness," they said. "Rebellion is not on our hearts." But how many times have people in our day impugned another person? They've judged their desires, they've judged their motives. They know exactly why they did such a thing. Never asked them. They judged them, because they know. I mean, after all, you went to the soup kitchen. We know you're a liberal.

I think sometimes we've done that today. Coming out of the -- and I don't even know if we're out of it yet -- we'll find it, but -- coming out of the virus, it was really sad to watch our whole nation, but frankly, the body of Christ. We came down to some really simplistic and kind of pathetic observations. If you wore a mask, you were a liberal. That's just -- that's what some pastors even said. I heard 'em. There were some pastors -- somewhere else, I won't name them -- wouldn't allow you to wear a mask. It's like, no -- you wear a mask, you're a mercenary of the governor. And if you take your mask off, then you're a conservative. I had tons of masks. Didn't always wear 'em, but I had tons of 'em. But the reality is, how many times did people judge each other? Candidly, that was two years I really don't want to live again. My favorite -- all-time favorite -- this is gonna go in my book that I'm never gonna write. This lady, she said, "Pastor, when are you gonna get the governor's knee off the back of your neck?" And I was like, "Wow, that's graphic." It was just after George Floyd. It's like -- "You know, tell you what. You're pretty profound in your ability to curse a person out." But we really did what the liberals and the conservatives did back in the 1900s -- we made all kinds of accusations, and sometimes we didn't even sit down and ask a person, "Tell me -- what are you

doing, and why? What do you think?" We just made these judgments based upon whatever we saw. And a lot of relationships got hurt.

One dear friend of mine pastoring in another city south of here said, "Mark, one of the things that just grieved my heart the most is that I saw people in my church that had 25-year relationships walk away from them." Immature? Well -- I don't know. Call Joshua immature. The reality is, 90 percent of life, perception is 90 percent of reality. That's true. It's just that ten percent is awfully critical. Why? Because they about slaughtered some really good friends over a perception that was wrong. That altar wasn't apostasy. That altar wasn't rebellion. That altar wasn't because they were departing and disloyal. In fact, the altar, the Reubenites said, "We built it as a reminder, Joshua, to you. We have no intention of sacrificing there. We have no intention of bringing our offerings there. We built it for you, because when you die, your grandchildren may not remember that we're a part of the family. You see, we're living on the other side of the river. And I'm afraid that when you die, Joshua, that your grandkids may not remember us, and they may look at us as aliens. Maybe even people that they need to kill. And so, we're building this altar as a witness to you and to God that we love you! And we love your God." The very thing that Joshua was judging them for was opposite. In fact, if you look at the end of this text, end of chapter 22, it says, "And the Reubenites and the Gadites gave the altar this name: A Witness Between Us—that the LORD is God." It wasn't an altar to rebellion, it was an altar to their commitment to God and a reminder to the Nation of Israel: "We may not live with you, but our hearts are with you." And they about died. Why? Because oftentimes the body of Christ is willing to make a judgment of a person's heart from a distance.

What did we learn? Listening hearts can become very good at peacemaking. Lesson number one: Direct conversation is always the best place to begin. Somebody had the brilliant idea: I think it was of God. "We're gonna send Phineas - he's the son of a priest. Kind of knows a little bit about maybe a reconciliation." And he sent Phineas, and a representative from each of the remaining tribes, and they went. It's such a good and biblical illustration and idea, but sometimes we just don't get it. And that is -- if Tom has hurt you, go to Tom. Don't go to Bill. Bill didn't have anything to do with it! And if you go to Bill and talk about Tom, you're gossiping. And you don't need to go to Bill and talk about Tom and say, "Hey, Bill, I need you to pray." No! Somebody offended you, and you need to go to them -- nobody else.

I can't tell you how many times somebody has called me, "Hey, Pastor -- I've been offended by so-and-so. Can I come in and talk about it?" No! I love you, but no! If you want to bring that person in, yes, that's wonderful. But if Bill has offended you, don't talk to Tom, and don't talk to me. I really don't have a special, you know, pipeline to God. My wife does -- I don't. I've lived with her for 38 years. God listens to her a lot better than He listens to me. But don't do this. That's exactly what Phineas did. He took the tribe, he took the representatives, and he went to the Reubenites and the Gadites, and he said, "Guys, it looks to us like you're apostate."

They said, "Oh man, that's the exact opposite." Direct conversation is always best. But when you go, be willing to listen. It's hard to listen when the soldiers are amped up. It is. It's hard to listen when the soldiers are frothing at the bit, and the spears are sharp, and their adrenalin is rushing, and they've said goodbye to their wives and said, "We've going to war again." "What? You're going to war? We've finished everybody!" "I know. We gotta take out the Gadites and the Reubenites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, because these guys are defecting. The very thing that Joshua told them not to do, they're doing! And we're gonna take 'em out. I'll be home in a couple of weeks." And the adrenalin is flying.

That's not when people like to listen. But you've got to if you're gonna hear the truth. You have to be willing to listen with an open heart, and you have to be willing to listen to what they say. "We did not build this temple -- this altar -- in rebellion. We built it because we wanted to remind you that our hearts are with you." And if you listen, you have to commit yourself to the truth. And sometimes when I commit myself to the truth, you know what it means? I have to say, "I'm sorry. I judged you wrongly. I'm sorry. I had a whole concoction of a motive and a story that doesn't fit reality at all." The fact is, perception is 90 percent of reality. But sometimes that ten percent is critical. You have to be willing to allow the truth to alter you. You have to be willing to allow the truth to put down your swords. You have to be willing to allow the truth to alter your state and perspective of what is right and what a person believes. If they come back to you and say, "You know what? I'm building this altar because I've rejected your God, and I don't want anything to do with you, and I'm building a god to some fertility god," then I would say you've got a different story. But how many times have we made a judgment of a person based upon perception -- what we saw, what we concluded -- and it's really not the truth at all?

And I say this lastly to us who I would classify our church, if you're just like -- "Where do we land?" I don't know where you're at, but I'm pretty conservative. I believe the Word of God completely. I believe when God says there's male and female -- yup, I'm in. I believe when God says, "I knit together a child in their mother's womb," that that's a child that has life the moment it was conceived. I believe that. I'll die on that hill. I believe that marriage is between a man and a woman. I believe that gender is not in the head; gender is determined by God. I'm about as conservative as they get, but here's the danger: sometimes when you're committed to that truth, you can use the truth with a level that feels more like a sledgehammer. And sometimes it's hard for people to hear you because your truth may be right but it is so harsh it's just hard to listen.

Commit yourself to the truth, but also commit yourself to love. Where do I see love in this passage? The Reubenites, Gadites, half-tribe of Manasseh didn't get defensive. It's a loving thing to not get defensive. They said, "Hey, talk to us." And they came, and they listened. It was an honorable thing for the Nation of Israel to say, "Hey, if this thing doesn't work out for you over here" -- verse 19 -- "If it doesn't work out, come live with us. Our hearts are with you." They were about to kill them! And the truth came to them, and they expressed their love for each other. But the

caution is this: If you elevate truth above love, you're gonna lose your audience and people will run from you. There are a lot of times I see people, especially on Facebook, true -- just brutal. I wouldn't want to listen to them either, and I agree with them. Sometimes people who have the truth, it's like -- "Man! I'm telling you what -- if you could have just one small measure of love and grace, you might actually make a difference. But you are so harsh." And so -- if we elevate truth above love, we're gonna lose our audience! People won't want to be around us. But if we elevate love above truth, then we'll lose our message and people won't respect you. And by the way -- you'll just be wrong.

What happened in this story -- not through great leadership, but actually the kindness of God to send Phineas with really, I think, a maturity beyond probably his age -- he spared two and a half nations of death. Why? Because he listened. Because he humbled himself. Because he lived with the truth and with love and he went back to his nation, and here was his thought: "Oh God, you spared us today from wounding and destroying part of Israel." Truth with love will bring harmony out of conflict. Doesn't mean you're soft. I'm not changing my view. I believe there are two genders. And I know I'll be hated. I will know. I've already gotten the letters. I've already gotten the promise of pickets. But that doesn't give me the right to hate people. I need to listen to them. And truth with love can oftentimes bring harmony out of conflict. If I walk down the path -- "I know what your desire is, I know what your motive is" -- no. I might be killing friendly people.

Joshua learned a lesson, and it's one I want to learn well. Truth with love will bring harmony out of conflict. Doesn't make you soft -- it makes you wise.

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