

Judge Me

After years of bloody battles, it's time to head home. You start to settle in, but before you do, you see your former soldiers standing at your gate, ready to fight — you?! What should be a time for peace has turned into a civil dispute. But it started with a whisper, someone telling someone else — the word spreading like wildfire that you're a troublemaker who needs to be corrected. You are living in idolatry! That's the scene in Joshua 22:10-34 with the people of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh as they returned home from the Canaanite conquest to find themselves on the brink of war with their countrymen over a simple misunderstanding.

I used to read this story from the three tribe's perspective and feel defensive. "Mind your own business!" "I haven't done anything wrong!" Or maybe, "Don't judge me!" But, re-reading this story, I think I was wrong. Perhaps the Israelites gathering their armies and sending a delegation to Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh was exactly what God wanted them to do (Deut. 13:12-15). Perhaps this lesson teaches us to be skillful and discerning judges of character.

The Big Idea: While harsh and critical judgments tear people down, God equips us to evaluate each other in a healthy and nurturing way.

Judge Me ...

- ... **Courageously** — bringing your concerns to me first.
 - Listening to the Lord's instructions in Deut. 13:12-15, the people didn't hesitate to approach the tribes with their concerns (Josh. 22:12-15)— no more gossip. The problem wasn't going to get solved without confrontation.
 - It's easy to take our complaints and observations to others, but Jesus directs us to each other first (Matt. 18:15).
 - We warn each other as brothers, not enemies (2 Thess. 3:14-15).
- ... **Protectively** — to maintain health and holiness in the body
 - Phinehas' was worried about a repeat of the tragedy at Peor and with Achan — he was worried for their sakes and his (Josh. 22:16-18; 20).
 - We watch out for signs of sin in our camp, judging our words and actions — not to be busybodies — but to ensure we're whole and healthy (Matt. 7:15-20).
 - And when we find a little leaven, we address it protectively and lovingly (1 Cor. 5:4-6).
- ... **Accurately** — ready to hear my side of the story
 - While the delegation thought they knew, they listened to hear their answer. Jumping to conclusions is fine, as long as you listen quickly to the truth (Josh. 22:30-31).
 - People misunderstood Jesus, too. He called them to look past what things appeared to be and to judge with "right judgment" — accurate and observant (John 7:24).
 - But we all can have a log in our eyes. Is something blocking us from seeing the truth? If we want to be skilled judges, we have to see clearly (Matt. 7:3-4)!
- ... **Sacrificially** — ready to help rather than complain
 - Phinehas made an incredible offer to the tribes: live with us if you can't live faithfully over there! Rather than making them figure it out, he came to the table with a solution — one which required the other tribes to sacrifice (Josh. 22:19).

- Offering to help someone resolve their problems may be the best way to show them you're not just complaining (Matt. 7:5).
- We're called to be in each other's business, helping, encouraging, and sacrificing for each other (1 Thess. 5:13-15).
- ... **Lovingly** — like you'd want to be judged
 - Of course, loving judgment may be all we need to say. If you loved me the way you loved yourself, wouldn't all judgments be welcomed (Matt. 7:2, 12)?
 - We lovingly bear all things, believe all things, and hope the best for each other when we judge like we'd want to be judged (1 Cor. 13:4-7).
 - Our love and mercy will accomplish more than our criticism and infighting (James 2:13).

Conclusion

Are you a good judge of character? Do you skillfully evaluate others in a healthy and nurturing way, or are you someone quick to tear others down and judge them too harshly?