



CEASE

TO

CONTEND

HEALING A NATION THROUGH
CHRISTLIKE CIVILITY IN POLITICS

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Paperback ISBN 13: 978-1-4621-4922-3

eBook ISBN 13: 978-1-4621-4923-0

Published by CFI, an imprint of Cedar Fort, Inc.

2373 W. 700 S., Suite 100, Springville, UT 84663

Distributed by Cedar Fort, Inc., www.cedarfort.com

Library of Congress Control Number: 2025931924

Cover design by Shawnda Craig

Cover design © 2025 Cedar Fort, Inc.

Edited and Typeset by Liz Kazandzhy

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed on acid-free paper

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George Washington’s Farewell Address, Doctrine and Covenants 136:23, and Pahoran

As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we are encouraged to engage in the political process in an informed and civil manner, respecting that fellow members of the Church come from various backgrounds and experiences and have differences of opinion in partisan political matters. We are also encouraged to be responsible, and part of that obligation is to become knowledgeable and well-versed about social, civic, and political issues and events. This is clearly and explicitly outlined in the “Political Neutrality and Participation” statement by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which was updated on June 1, 2023.³ A humble aim of this small book is to aid in this process during an era of so much political deception, distortions, half-truths, and intense political division and polarization.

Cease to Contend draws from three historical events: (1) President Washington’s farewell address, (2) Doctrine and Covenants 136:23, and (3) Pahoran’s example in the Book of Mormon. It outlines a three-step process to increase civility in social and political thought and engagement. *Cease to Contend* is additionally rooted in Aristotle’s introspection, modern-day social science, and principles from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

To a lesser degree, this book also draws from one of Socrates’ most famous sayings, “To know thyself is the beginning of wisdom.”⁴ Socrates believed self-knowledge could be developed through conversation, such as listening to others with different views. He also believed that busyness distracted people from essential questions about themselves and that quiet reflection was needed. Chapter 2, which is focused on identifying within ourselves six prevalent cognitive distortions couched specifically in political thinking, is based on the axiom “To know thyself is the beginning of wisdom.” One of the reframing techniques you will learn about in chapter 2 is Socratic questioning, obviously named after Socrates.⁵

GEORGE WASHINGTON'S FAREWELL ADDRESS AND DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS 136:23

Washington's farewell address was published on September 19, 1796, as a written letter to "friends and fellow-citizens" printed in *Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser*, an American newspaper headquartered in Philadelphia. The address was circulated approximately ten weeks before the presidential electors cast their votes in the 1796 election and, by design, hit newspapers as Washington rolled out of Philadelphia in his coach to return to his beloved Mount Vernon. Washington did not want to interfere in the upcoming election.⁶

The farewell address is considered long, at 7,641 words, and Washington sought out Alexander Hamilton during the writing process. It covers many things, such as a warning that national identity must trump local attachments, as Washington feared that hyperpartisanship and polarization could destroy our nation. What is most relevant to *Cease to Contend* is that Washington challenged people to improve their performance as citizens. He urged citizens to engage in responsible civic behavior, which included being responsible in the political process and informed about social and political issues. In Washington's second term as president, there was intense division and polarization (between federalists and anti-federalists), and various newspapers were printing stories that were heinously untrue about George Washington, such as he was secretly trying to create an American monarchy and taking bribes from the British kingdom.

Doctrine and Covenants 136:23 is a revelation that was given to Brigham Young on January 14, 1847.⁷ As president of the Quorum of the Twelve at the death of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young was responsible for leading the Saints westward toward the Rocky Mountains. Autumn of 1846 found 15,000 exiled Latter-day Saints temporarily living at Winter Quarters near Omaha, Nebraska, and Council Bluffs, Iowa. Their prophet, Joseph Smith, had been killed, along with his brother Hyrum, while being held in Carthage Jail. The Saints were driven from the city of Nauvoo and were walking to present-day Utah. Among the Saints was contention and wild bickering, and members of the Church needed to "cease to contend with one another." Contention is a heated disagreement, and this revelation ended such contention and brought calmness and unity.

BECOMING BETTER CITIZENS AND CEASING TO CONTEND IS NEEDED TODAY

This same counsel—to become responsible and informed about social and political issues and to cease to contend with others—is greatly needed today considering the highly conflict-driven political climate in the United States where heated disagreement is everywhere, from local venues like community libraries and public schools all the way to state and federal elections.

In the last five years, unprecedented contention has been linked to the federal election. Two examples are the assassination attempt on Donald Trump on July 13, 2024, as he was campaigning near Butler, Pennsylvania, and the January 6 (2021) United States Capitol attack in which a mob attempted a coup two months after Trump's defeat in the

2020 presidential election. There are more examples of extraordinary disputations in politics. For example:

- On January 6, 2021, another mob gathered at the home of former Georgia election worker Ruby Freeman, accusing her of helping to steal the 2020 election and referring to her as a “professional vote scammer.” Freeman reported that the FBI warned her that she should flee for her safety.⁸
- Georgia’s Republican secretary of state Brad Raffensperger, his wife, Tricia, and their family received threats of violence months after the 2020 election, also subject to false claims of being complicit in votes being stolen away from Donald Trump.⁹
- In September 2024, a second assassination attempt on Donald Trump happened while he was playing golf in West Palm Beach, Florida.¹⁰
- On Thanksgiving Day in 2024, five of Connecticut’s Congress members were notified of bomb threats targeting their homes.¹¹
- In 2022, the husband of former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi was violently attacked at his home in San Francisco based on the assailant’s belief in conspiracy theories.¹²
- In 2017, an attacker, who openly expressed hatred toward Republicans, opened gunfire during a baseball practice of Republican lawmakers who were preparing for the congressional baseball game. Representative Steve Scalise was critically injured.¹³

In 2024, Cynthia Miller-Idriss, director of research at American University’s “Polarization & Extremism Research & Innovation Lab,” clearly articulated that polarizing rhetoric that captures political opponents as existential threats is a problem at both the elite level and among ordinary people in everyday life.¹⁴ As George Washington stated just under 230 years ago, Americans need to become better citizens so they contend less.

COUNSEL FROM LATTERDAY SAINT LEADERS AND SOURCES ON CONTENTION

If you go to the website of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and look up the word *contention*, it states, “Contention brings unhappiness into our homes and into our lives. Satan is the father of contention and all the misery that it brings. Our Father in Heaven wants us to fill our lives with love and eliminate contention.”¹⁵ It then lists these scriptural references:

- 3 Nephi 11:29–30: “For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another.”
- Doctrine and Covenants 136:23: “Cease to contend one with another; cease to speak evil one of another.”
- Mosiah 4:14–15: “And ye will not suffer your children that they go hungry, or naked; neither will ye suffer that they transgress the laws of God, and fight and quarrel one with another, and serve the devil, who is the master of sin, or who is

the evil spirit which hath been spoken of by our fathers, he being an enemy to all righteousness. But ye will teach them to walk in the ways of truth and soberness; ye will teach them to love one another, and to serve one another.”

- Proverbs 13:10: “Only by pride cometh contention.”
- Matthew 5:25: “Agree with thine adversary quickly”

In 2024, President Dallin H. Oaks shared the following about contention:

Another of our Savior’s teachings seems to require reemphasis in the circumstances of our day.

This is a time of many harsh and hurtful words in public communications and sometimes even in our families. Sharp differences on issues of public policy often result in actions of hostility—even hatred—in public and personal relationships. This atmosphere of enmity sometimes even paralyzes capacities for lawmaking on matters of importance where most citizens see an urgent need for some action in the public interest.

What should followers of Christ teach and do in this time of toxic communications? What were His teachings and examples?

It is significant that among the first principles Jesus taught when He appeared to the Nephites was to *avoid contention*. While He taught this in the context of disputes over religious doctrine, the reasons He gave clearly apply to communications and relationships in politics, public policy, and family relationships. Jesus taught:

“He that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another.

“Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away.”

In His remaining ministry among the Nephites, Jesus taught other commandments closely related to His prohibition of contention. We know from the Bible that He had previously taught each of these in His great Sermon on the Mount, usually in precisely the same language He later used with the Nephites.¹⁶

Likewise, President Russell M. Nelson has counseled, “Contention drives away the Spirit—every time. Contention reinforces the false notion that confrontation is the way to resolve differences; but it never is. Contention is a choice. Peacemaking is a choice. You have your agency to choose contention or reconciliation. I urge you to choose to be a peacemaker, now and always.”¹⁷

As members of the Church, we also can heed George Washington’s call to become better citizens, and more importantly, we can follow the scriptures and modern-day Church leaders to cease to contend.

POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONTENTION AMONG THE SAINTS IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS

As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we are not perfect, and it is easy to move toward contention, especially when it comes to political and social issues. I witnessed unfathomable contention among members of my church family after Iowa governor Kim Reynolds issued mask mandates in November 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Hal Boyd’s 2021 article in the *Deseret News*, titled “Let’s Go

Brandon’ Chants Don’t Belong at BYU Games,” underscored a crude and mocking gesture that Brigham Young University (BYU) fans directed toward the president of the United States. (“Let’s Go Brandon” is a political catchphrase and internet meme used as a euphemism for an unbelievable, shocking, and distasteful commentary that is related to swear words directed toward President Joe Biden.) Boyd outlined, “Such demonstrations fall beneath the mark of good citizenship, let alone the more lofty aims of Christian discipleship which call on us to love our enemies.”¹⁸

I might be wrong, but I would venture to guess that many BYU fans did not know what the term meant and just joined in to jeer President Joe Biden, and some may have just started chanting to be part of the cheering, not knowing what the term meant. But it is still troubling to hear throngs of BYU fans, most of whom are members of the Church, intoning such a repulsive phrase. Boyd referenced the comments of President Dallin H. Oaks, sharing his concern with how Americans and Church members are handling the national issues that divide us and his call for a better way forward by reconciling adverse positions through respectful negotiation. As reported in the *Deseret News*, a 2024 poll underscored that more than 43 percent of Utahns believe that violence against the government can be justified (in this poll, 46 percent of Utah Republicans stated it could be justified, compared to 38 percent of Democrats). Among members of the Church, this survey identified that 35 percent reported that violence against the government can be justified, while 65 percent believe it can never be justified.¹⁹ Contention precedes violence.

As Judge Thomas B. Griffith commented in the foreword of this book, “Contempt has replaced reasoned argument, and enmity is the fuel that fires much of our politics.” Healthy political disagreement is the foundation of democracy. Democracy cannot exist without opposing views, public policies, or an oppositional party. However, people can disagree politically in respectful ways and without contention.

As further evidence of the state of political contention that our country is in, a 2021 Pew Research study indicated that 59 percent of Americans find political conversations with those they disagree with as “stressful and frustrating,” up 9 percent since 2019. More specifically, 58 percent of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents say they find talking politics with people they disagree with stressful, up 11 percentage points since 2019, and 60 percent of Democrats and Democrat-leaning independents say they find such conversations taxing and frustrating, up 7 percent since 2019. Interestingly, this study also found that nearly two-thirds of white adults (65 percent) say they find talking about politics with people they disagree with to be stressful—much higher than Black (43 percent), Hispanic (47 percent), and Asian (53 percent) adults.²⁰

PAHORANAS AN EXAMPLE FROM THE BOOK OF MORMON

One of the most vivid examples of “ceasing to contend” with others and listening to understand comes from the exchange between Pahoran, the chief judge (governor) of Zarahemla, and Captain Moroni, a righteous Nephite military commander, in Alma 60–61 of the Book of Mormon. Moroni begins to address Pahoran “by way of condemnation” (Alma 60:2) because he believes Pahoran has betrayed him. Moroni accuses him of neglect and slothfulness and even wonders if he might be a traitor (see

Alma 60:18). Pahoran is responsible for sending Captain Moroni war provisions but has been unable because there was a coup against him and he was leading a government in exile. Moroni has no idea of the social context surrounding Pahoran and asserts, “Ye know that ye do transgress the laws of God, and ye do know that ye do trample them under your feet” (Alma 60:33), and then exhorts Pahoran to repent of his mistakes! The problem, however, is that Moroni was mistaken, and Pahoran was actually doing his best to support Moroni.

Pahoran’s example is paramount to this book, as he is well-mannered and civil in the face of Moroni’s undeserved criticism and continues to hear Moroni’s voice. Pahoran could have responded in many ways, including with bitterness or even contempt; however, he instead states, “In your epistle you have censured me, but it mattereth not; I am not angry, but do rejoice in the greatness of your heart” (Alma 61:9). Pahoran chooses to focus his mind on rejoicing in the greatness of Moroni’s heart and not on self-talk that ruminates on being mistreated or on the poor dispositional or character traits of Moroni. Pahoran then goes even further and offers a dignified reinterpretation or reframing of Moroni’s letter: “I was somewhat worried concerning what we should do. . . . But ye have said, except they repent the Lord hath commanded you that ye should go against them” (Alma 61:19–20).

In modern-day psychology, specifically in areas such as cognitive behavioral therapy, logotherapy, and positive psychology, what Pahoran did was to frame or structure his thoughts within a positive framework and not follow dysfunctional or damaging thoughts that could lead to a host of negative feelings and behaviors. As a licensed mental health counselor, I have written many treatment goals like this: “Within six weeks, the client will learn to reframe negative and fear-based thoughts to reality-based positive thinking.” How we think of others, such as those we disagree with politically, has a lot to do with how we feel and behave when engaging with them or trying to hear their voice (or cancel them out and silence them). This book aims to help you, the reader, change how you think about political leaders and neighbors who think so very differently. After reading this book, I hope you, the reader, can listen to understand and not listen to argue and seek to unify. That is, I hope we can all be more like Pahoran.

In many states right now, especially in Iowa (where I live), there are political debates regarding whether teachers should be armed in schools or if schools should be places that allow no guns. The thinking of arming teachers is that it provides a quick defense system if a person walks into a school and starts shooting at children and staff. The thinking of keeping schools gun-free is that more weapons in schools will lead to more guns falling into the wrong hands, making schools less safe. I have witnessed people on both sides of this issue scream at each other in public settings. If each side thinks of the other as idiotic, deranged, stupid, rednecks / clueless liberals, and so forth, those negative thoughts will result in negative feelings and behaviors. But if a person can pause, hear another person, and then reflect—listening to understand (instead of contending)—they might realize that both sides have a principal commonality: They both want (or are united) to protect their kids because they both love their children at intense levels. Both are on the same page regarding higher-order thinking; they just disagree on the means to the end.

If we start by finding reality-based positive thoughts and common ground—and parents on both sides of this issue wanting to protect their children seem reality-based to me, firmly on common ground—it is easier to hear the other voice and then engage in the more difficult task of agreeing on something in the middle. As Stephen R. Covey stated years ago, “Seek first to understand before being understood.”²¹

Captain Moroni is a hero to many members of the Church, and for obvious reasons. But I find it remarkable that in Alma 60–61, we learn that a very righteous man can make honest mistakes. While serving as a bishop in Cedar Falls, Iowa, I worked hard to be righteous and repented daily, but I still made honest mistakes. Moroni’s mistake was making a judgment without understanding the social context, and it is something I have also done. I am sure you, the reader, have done this too! Following automatic (first) thoughts and not questioning them is at the core of cognitive distortions—which are exaggerated or irrational thought patterns involved in the onset or perpetuation of negativity and sometimes psychopathological states, such as depression and anxiety—and working on these cognitive distortions is the heart and soul of cognitive behavioral therapy. This book teaches how to identify six prevalent cognitive distortions couched specifically in political thinking and how to reframe them so we can listen to understand. Instead of following automatic thoughts of seeing the other as an enemy, we start by pausing such thoughts and listening to another person so we can understand them. That is how we begin to modify and unify. It starts with an individual mindset.

In a recent *Deseret News* article, Thomas B. Griffith, writing about the early Constitution, outlined that the framers tried to understand one another and were willing to give up some things they valued dearly for the sake of unity.²² Akhil Amar, one of our era’s most significant Constitutional scholars, has outlined how George Washington had the cognitive aptitude to find a middle ground when engaging with anti-federalists.²³ Judge Griffith posited how vital President Oaks’ general conference talk was in directing Saints to seek to moderate and unify contested political issues.²⁴ In modern-day psychology, this is known as cognitive agility (also known as cognitive flexibility or elasticity), the ability to consider different perspectives and opinions and find a middle ground. It is also known as being open-minded and is at the center of good mental health.²⁵ The opposite, cognitive rigidity, is the inability to adapt or change mentally and is at the root of many mental health issues, relationship problems, interpersonal and community conflict, and hatred.²⁶

A THREE-STEP APPROACH TO DECREASE CONTENTION AND INCREASE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CIVILITY

Cease to Contend presents a three-step approach to increase social and political civility and is broken into six chapters. Although there are wise sociological and ecological methods²⁷ that can be taken to lower social and political strife and increase community and partisan politeness and respect, this book takes a personal approach that each individual can make behavioral changes to decrease contention. The three behavioral changes are:

1. Identify your cognitive distortions to increase social and political civility and lower contention.
2. Develop better listening skills so you can listen to people who have different political views.
3. Improve media literacy skills so you can better navigate through social and mass media.

There is an abundance of research that demonstrates that one of the best approaches to lower civic disagreement is positive contact and interpersonal relationships with people who think differently. Haidt captures this well, stating, “If you really want to open your mind, open your heart first. If you can have at least one friendly interaction with a member of the ‘other’ group, you’ll find it far easier to listen to what they’re saying, and maybe even see a controversial issue in a new light.”²⁸ But I would argue it takes a little homework to increase the probability of having a friendly interaction with people who think differently from you politically and socially, and that homework is the three steps outlined in this book.

CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

Drawing on forty years of research in cognitive behavioral therapy, chapter 2 will focus on cognitive distortions. That is, step one is for readers to learn how to identify these cognitive distortions in themselves (not in others) and how to reframe them so they can listen to understand people who have different political views and ideas.

One of the most common cognitive distortions is extreme black-and-white thinking. In political dialogue, it comes out as “my side is right and yours is wrong.” Such thinking creates a superior dichotomy of them and us, with little thought of a middle ground. Sometimes negative labels can be added to this cognitive distortion, such as “What a complete idiot—they’re so stupid and so wrong. How can they be that dumb?” Such thoughts lead to negative feelings and behaviors toward “the other.” But if a person can reframe such automatic thoughts—to something like “It’s not that one person is right and the other wrong; we’ve had very diverse life experiences, and they think about the issue differently”—they will feel less negativity toward others who think differently. Another reframe can be “I’m overacting and need to calm down. If I listen, I might be able to understand their thinking and learn something.” Another might be “Although we may have to agree to disagree, if I listen and show respect, our relationship might improve, and they might be willing to hear my voice.” I believe all of these reframed thoughts will decrease the feelings of negativity when compared to the first cognitive distortions of “My side is right and yours is wrong” or “What a complete idiot.” Hopefully, readers can learn to pause or suspend their automatic thoughts to hear another person with accuracy, demonstrating dignity toward others with whom they disagree.

Chapter 2 identifies six prevalent cognitive distortions couched specifically in political thinking as well as twelve ways a person can reframe automatic cognitive distortions into reality-based positive ways of thinking. Doing this should decrease the intense feelings of dislike, anger, and even hatred toward people who have different social and political

values and ideas.

Step two is learning how to listen, and chapter 3 is focused on the science and art of listening. As you will learn from the historical scholarship presented in chapter 3 and throughout this book, both George Washington and Abraham Lincoln had an incredible ability to listen to people they disagreed with, and they were both open-minded and avid readers. Chapter 3 will teach the skill set of listening, including eight listening actions, such as summarizing, paraphrasing, and asking questions to hear another person with greater accuracy, clarity, depth, and breadth. That is, the key is learning how to listen to understand, not learning how to listen to argue or shame another person. Chapter 3 will also build on President Nelson's talk from 1991 titled "Listen to Learn."

George Washington understood that in the early days of the republic, his most overriding role was to keep the Union together by "showing skeptics and critics that their voices had indeed been heard, that the promises made in ratification conventions . . . would be redeemed, not ignored."²⁹ Washington had the cognitive flexibility to compromise. He (and almost all the other Philadelphia signers) had rejected George Mason's proposal to create the Bill of Rights but was then open-minded enough to reflect and change his view and agree with the anti-federalists. The psychological soul of the Constitution is compromise.

Chapter 4 will introduce the third step, media literacy skills. Media literacy is the ability to analyze and evaluate media, and this chapter will have an acute focus on political discourse so that the reader can attempt to be better informed about politics and understand how media, linked to profit, attempts to dupe and hoodwink people. Media stories that are more sensational, angry, or fearful bring in more viewers, which then increases the amount of money advertising and sponsors are willing to pay. This chapter will use research-based media literacy approaches and draw on Kristoffer Boyle's article, found on the Church website, about using media literacy to find truth during an age of misinformation.³⁰ Chapter 4 provides five media literacy action steps that you can use to become politically knowledgeable and well-versed.

Chapter 5, the shortest chapter, will address how to be a good citizen; that is, it goes further than these three steps to provide additional suggestions toward becoming a virtuous community member. It provides an answer in the contemporary period for the axiom George Washington stated in his farewell address when he challenged all Americans to be better citizens. This chapter will draw extensively on Dr. Richard Haass's book *The Bill of Obligations: The Ten Habits of Good Citizens*, which includes lessons on how to stay open to compromise, reject violence, respect government service, and support the teaching of civics in our school systems. In many ways, this last chapter is a book review of Haass's treatise. Chapter 6 provides five cases of exemplary leaders who demonstrated cognitive elasticity, open-mindedness and ceased to contend.

Here is a summary of the steps and details that will be covered:

STEP 1: IDENTIFY YOUR COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS AND REFRAME THEM TO CREATE A LISTENING MINDSET

Six cognitive distortions:

1. An all-or-nothing mentality
2. Overgeneralization
3. Mental filter
4. Discounting the positives
5. Jumping to conclusions
6. Magnification and minimization

Twelve techniques to reframe cognitive distortions to decrease contention and view differing political views in a more accurate and positive way:

1. Thinking in shades of gray
2. Arguing with yourself
3. Socratic dialogue
4. Double standard technique
5. Double standard technique with a self-disclosure
6. Semantic method
7. Counting the positives
8. Inquiry
9. Examining the evidence
10. Cost-benefit analysis
11. Self-monitoring
12. Exposure or contact

STEP 2: LISTEN TO UNDERSTAND INSTEAD OF LISTENING TO ARGUE

Eight listening skills and techniques:

1. Paraphrasing
2. Clarification
3. Reflection
4. Summarization
5. Probing
6. Information-giving (listening through open-minded questioning)
7. Interpretation
8. Confrontation (or challenge)

STEP 3: DEVELOP MEDIA LITERACY TO BECOME POLITICALLY INFORMED

Five actions to improve media literacy skills:

1. Listen, without interruption, to the political candidate you oppose with respect, dignity, and an open mind (that is, hear both or multiple sides).
2. Read books written by candidates (and their core supporters) and on specific political ideas and concepts.
3. Rely on multiple and different media sources
4. Engage in less entertainment and more disciplined and somber reflection.

5. Participate in the social and political spheres in the real world.

THIS BOOK CAN HELP YOU IN OTHER AREAS OF YOUR LIFE

In one sense, the three-step approach shared in this book to increase social and political civility and decrease contention is simple. The three steps, again, are to (1) identify your cognitive distortions, (2) develop better listening skills, and (3) improve media literacy skills. In another sense, integrating these steps into everyday life will be extremely difficult. Over the years, I have worked with all sorts of people with mental health struggles, and most people change one step at a time. I would encourage readers to start with one or two steps and not try to implement the entire three-step process in one shot. Behavioral change is usually a step-by-step, continual process. Finding your cognitive distortions will be difficult, as seeing those distortions in other people is so much easier. Learning to listen to someone with very different political ideas is arduous, as it is so much easier to listen to someone who has similar political beliefs (your tribal group or social media echo chamber). Developing media literacy skills takes a significant amount of time to master. In addition, we all live busy lives.

But I believe in this three-step process; over the last twenty years, it has become habitual in my life (although I still have much to improve). I am very comfortable hearing the political views of Democrats, Republicans, Libertarians, Green Party members, and so forth. Through the various chapters, I provide examples of everyday Americans and politicians who have made such changes, and I underscore this ability in both George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, who most political scientists and historians consider to be the two best presidents in the history of our nation. I also pepper self-disclosures of how I have attempted to live these very steps in my own life. In the conclusion of this book, I share how another person, world-renowned moral and social psychologist Jonathan Haidt, has also made this change toward understanding people who think so very differently than he does about politics.

Learning this three-step approach will help you in many other areas, such as becoming a better parent, spouse, coworker, and neighbor. For example, my cognitive distortions affected my parenting and my relationship with my wife and coworkers in negative ways, and when I learned about these internal thinking errors, not only did I understand myself better (celebrating that I can become better and not beating myself up), but I could understand my wife and coworkers better. I have become a better spouse, parent, and coworker by learning how to reframe my cognitive distortions and how to listen better. And gaining better media literacy has helped me navigate media's powerful and ubiquitous influence.

I also encourage you to use prayer in implementing these three steps and use repentance and the Atonement of Jesus Christ to help change behaviors. The three steps outlined in this book are all evidence-based and research-based and are utilized in everyday mental health counseling. But using the power of Christ is most paramount, as it is the ability to draw upon the infinite power and love of Jesus Christ to overcome challenges and experience joy, peace, and consolation.³¹

3. "Political Neutrality and Participation," The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, June 1, 2023, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/official-statement/political-neutrality>.

4. The words “know thyself” were inscribed on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi in ancient Greece. While many believe that Socrates invented it, this phrase has been attributed to many ancient Greek thinkers.
5. One good source to better understand Socrates (and stoicism) and apply his thinking to modern-day psychology is the book *The Stoicism Workbook: How the Wisdom of Socrates Can Help You Build Resilience and Overcome Anything Life Throws at You* (2024), written by Waltman, Codd, and Pierce. These authors also outline the strong relationships between cognitive distortion, cognitive behavioral therapy, and the ideas of Socrates.
6. The information in this section regarding George Washington’s farewell address is taken from Ron Chernow, *Washington: A Life* (Penguin Books, 2011), 752–63. For a primary source, Washington’s farewell address can be read online, with annotated notes, at the Library of Congress; see <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mgw2.024/?sp=229&st=text>.
7. The information regarding Doctrine and Covenants 136 is from Chad M. Orton, “This Shall Be Our Covenant,” in *Revelations in Context: The Stories Behind the Sections of the Doctrine and Covenants*, ed. Matthew S. McBride and James Goldberg (Intellectual Reserve, Inc., 2016), 307–314. See also <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/revelations-in-context/this-shall-be-our-covenant>.
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