

Carol Stewart
AM ST 304
Professor Mike Taylor
Friday, April 10, 2026

Becoming Peacemakers

Peace felt simple to me at the start of the semester, at least in theory. If I pictured peacemaking, I imagined calm voices, careful listening, and respectful conversations. As the weeks went on, that picture no longer held. I began to see that a polite tone can coexist with pride, impatience, and the urge to win. Peace reaches deeper than composure. It touches motive, discipline, self-command, and character. This class has pressed me to consider who I am in moments of strain, not only how I sound. That question has turned peacemaking from a pleasant ideal into a demanding form of discipleship.

My experience striving to make peace this semester has uncovered more of my interior life than I expected. In tense moments, I still lean toward control, tidy resolution, and the private comfort of assuming I am right. President Russell M. Nelson's statement, "Contention is a choice. Peacemaking is a choice."¹ That sentence leaves no room for blaming the mood in the room, the sharpness of another person, or the pressure of the moment. That statement leaves no room for deflection; the question turns inward. What am I adding here? Am I bringing ego, impatience, and the desire to win, or am I bringing steadiness, honesty, and charity? Over time this semester, peacemaking has stopped sounding passive to me. It is beginning to look more like moral courage. It asks for truth without cruelty, conviction without contempt, and restraint without cowardice. That is a much more demanding standard than simply sounding kind.

The call becomes even more concrete in President Dallin H. Oaks's recent words. In

¹ Russell M. Nelson, "Peacemakers Needed," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, April 2023, accessed April 10, 2026, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org>. Shortened: Nelson, "Peacemakers Needed."

April 2026, he asks, “Peacemakers! How would it change the world if followers of Christ would forgo harsh and hurtful words in all their communications?” and that single word, charity, exposes how often I still want peace to serve my preferences.² I want quick repair, favorable outcomes, and a version of harmony that costs me little. Efforts to hold my tongue longer, to apologize faster, or to soften my language have shown me how much I rely on grace rather than sheer willpower. President Dallin H. Oaks’s April asks that followers of Christ “forgo harsh and hurtful words in all their communications.”³ That image is reshaping how I think about disagreement, reminding me that a tense exchange is rarely only about the words used in that moment. Beneath the surface, there may be fear, injury, memory, loyalty, identity, power, or long habits of interpretation. A careless response can miss all of that. Careful attention can begin to uncover it. Through that lens, peacemaking is becoming less about easing tension and more about learning how to read human situations with greater patience and accuracy.

The classroom kept pressing all of this into reality because ideas are easy until they have names, faces, and lived experiences attached to them. People do not walk into a room with tidy positions in a debate. They arrive with histories, burdens, loyalties, griefs, assumptions, and hopes that may not be immediately apparent. Deloria and Olson describe culture as involving “the transmission and transformation of meanings” and the consequences those meanings have for “our senses of self, group, and world.”⁴ That framework made quick judgments feel irresponsible. A single comment may carry the weight of family memory, community loyalty, fear about the future, or long frustration with being unheard. Instead of slotting classmates into

² Dallin H. Oaks, “Alive in Christ,” in *April 2026 General Conference: Sunday Morning Session*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, April 5, 2026, accessed April 10, 2026, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org>. Shortened: Oaks, “Alive in Christ.”

³ Philip J. Deloria and Alexander I. Olson, *American Studies: A User’s Guide* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 5. Shortened: Deloria and Olson, *American Studies*, 5.

⁴ Philip J. Deloria and Alexander I. Olson, *American Studies: A User’s Guide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 9.

familiar categories, I found myself more willing to pause and ask what meanings might be at work beneath their words. Outside the classroom, that same posture mattered in headlines, social media threads, and ward conversations. President Nelson’s warning that “anger never persuades” and that “contention never leads to inspired solutions”⁵ aligned with what I saw there. If I wanted any hope of understanding layered experiences, harshness could not be my first response.

The more I have tried to live this way, the more I see both growth and unfinished work in myself. Earlier in the semester, I would have described my approach to peace as sincere but limited to a focus on calmness and basic respect. Now I hold myself to a different measure. Peace without truth feels like pretense. Truth without kindness feels like combat. Keeping both present at once demands humility, discernment, and ongoing correction. It also calls for courage: courage to stay in hard conversations long enough to hear what is being said, and courage to set boundaries when staying would quietly enable harm. Elder Neil L. Andersen’s description of “sacrifice, charity, patience, and being a peacemaker” as part of “the very character of Christ” gives this work a larger horizon.⁶ It suggests that peace is not a single skill to master, but a way a soul is shaped over time. Looking ahead, I do not want peacemaking to remain an American Studies 304 theme I recall fondly. I want it to influence how I speak in family group chats, how I navigate political disagreement, how I respond when a friend trusts me with something painful, and how I behave when no one else is watching. Peace may begin in the heart, but it proves itself in ordinary patterns of speech and response. That is where I hope it will continue to shape my character, long after this semester is over.

⁵ Russell M. Nelson, “Peacemakers Needed,” General Conference, April 2023.

⁶ Neil L. Andersen, “Address,” in *April 2026 General Conference: Sunday Afternoon Session*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, April 5, 2026, accessed April 10, 2026, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org>.

Bibliography

Andersen, Neil L. "Eternal Marriage Is an Eternal Journey." In "April 2026 General Conference: Sunday Afternoon Session Summary." The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Newsroom. April 5, 2026. Accessed April 10, 2026.

Deloria, Philip J., and Alexander I. Olson. *American Studies: A User's Guide*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017.

Nelson, Russell M. "Peacemakers Needed." General Conference, April 2023.

Oaks, Dallin H. "Alive in Christ." In "April 2026 General Conference: Sunday Morning Session Summary." The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Newsroom. April 5, 2026. Accessed April 10, 2026.