

I have been trying to determine how to start the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion program this academic year. As luck would have it I saw this TED Talk.

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I was a blue-eyed, chubby-cheeked five-year-old when I joined my family on the picket line for the first

to see me at a picket in New Orleans. He brought me a Middle Eastern dessert from Jerusalem, where he lives, and I brought him kosher chocolate and held a "God hates Jews" sign.

02:54

(Laughter)

02:57

There was no confusion about our positions, but the line between friend and foe was becoming blurred. We'd started to see each other as human beings, and it changed the way we spoke to one another.

03:08

It took time, but eventually these conversations planted seeds of doubt in me. My friends on Twitter took the time to understand Westboro's doctrines, and in doing so, they were able to find inconsistencies I'd missed my entire life. Why did we advocate the death penalty for gays when Jesus said, "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone?" How could we claim to love our neighbor while at the same time praying for God to destroy them? The truth is that the care shown to me by these strangers on the internet was itself a contradiction. It was growing evidence that people on the other side were not the demons I'd been led to believe.

03:48

These realizations were life-altering. Once I saw that we were not the ultimate arbiters of divine truth but flawed human beings, I couldn't pretend otherwise. I couldn't justify our actions -- especially our cruel practice of protesting funerals and celebrating human tragedy. These shifts in my perspective contributed to a larger erosion of trust in my church, and eventually it made it impossible for me to stay.

04:16

to hide was almost paralyzing. I wanted to hide from the judgement of my family, who I knew would never speak to me again -- people whose thoughts and opinions had meant everything to me. And I wanted to hide from the world I'd rejected for so long -- people who had no reason at all to give me a

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And finally ... make the argument. This might seem obvious, but one side effect of having strong beliefs is that we sometimes assume that the value of our position is or should be obvious and self-evident, that we shouldn't have to defend our positions because they're so clearly right and good that if someone doesn't get it, it's their problem -- that it's not my job to educate them. But if it were that simple, we would all see things the same way. As kind as my friends on Twitter were, if they hadn't actually made their arguments, it would've been so much harder for me to see the world in a different way. We are all a product of our upbringing, and our beliefs reflect our experiences. We can't expect others to spontaneously change their own minds. If we want change, we have to make the case for it.

13:05

My friends on Twitter didn't abandon their beliefs or their principles -- only their scorn. They channeled their infinitely justifiable offense and came to me with pointed questions tempered with kindness and humor. They approached me as a human being,

The early conversations on my Twitter account are all still visible because I chose not to delete them. I didn't ever want to whitewash my history or forget where I come from.

00:16

Note

He brought me a Middle Eastern dessert from Jerusalem, where he lives, and I brought him kosher chocolate and held a "God Hates Jews" sign.

If you'd like to see this exchange from David's perspective, he wrote a [blog post](#) about it at the time. The dynamic is so surreal that it still makes me laugh.

00:38

Back

Back

Note

"It took time, but eventually these conversations planted seeds of doubt in me."

In a [profile published in 2015](#), New Yorker staff writer Adrian Chen did a brilliant job of bringing light to these conversations and how they developed over time.

00:45

Note

"I wrote an apology for the harm I'd caused, but I also knew that an apology could never undo any of it."

Writing [this apology](#)

effective way to get compassion from the other side is to first give it. This is non-complementary behavior, and it is both very difficult and incredibly powerful.

01:15

Note

"We just have to decide that it's going to start with us."

"f you make this choice, see the "Take action" section on my talk page for more ideas on steps to take next!