I first met Greg on Halloween of my first year at Carolina. In his mid-forties with a dark goatee and a Bible in his hand, he balanced on railing so that he stood just above the masses of Franklin street. He preached to a group of onlookers that comically included a man in a devil costume, plastic pitchfork in hand. I watched him for a little while as he spoke on many topics. Eventually I interrupted him to ridicule him for his beliefs about evolution, with the kind of unreserved confidence that only an 18-year-old can muster. When he continued, apparently unmoved by my condescending telling-off, I walked away.

As it turned out, Greg the Preacher had a schedule, and would regularly stand up in the pit and proselytize for hours. Whereas the notorious Gary the Pit Preacher gathered large crowds with his bright red “Fear God” sign and nonsensical non sequiturs, Greg would engage students in long conversations. I listened in to some of these and it quickly became clear that he had a deep knowledge of the scripture. Further, he struck me as empathetic and genuinely invested in the well-being of those around him.

I started to speak with him regularly over the next two years. We would have long, meandering conversations in the shade of the overcup oaks. So many, in fact, that my group of friends eventually stopped waiting for me when I walked over and started up a conversation. We all knew that, at the end of the day, I wouldn’t change my mind and neither would Greg. My friends were bothered by this. If we were both settled in our views, why spend the time engaging at all? Quite honestly, I didn’t know. I enjoyed the discussions, I thought they were important, but at the time I couldn’t explain why.
I don’t see Greg very often anymore, solely because my classes never take me far enough south to cross his path. Slightly removed from our talks, I pieced together why I found such meaning in these discussions. Usually, they weren’t centered on what, but *how*. How to live, from a moral perspective, is one of (if not the) most central question that we all face. These debates with Greg the Preacher were special because they affirmed his humanity. Morality, which we both took so seriously, was somewhat of a bridge between our two very different world views. I understood very little about him, his motives, and his beliefs when I first met him two years ago. In large part, that explains my regrettable behavior towards him. It took a recognition of his status as a moral being for me to see his humanity, and that connection is one that has meant a lot to me.

Jonathan Haidt, in his book *The Righteous Mind*, argues that moral values underpin political views, and that that is what makes partisan debates so fundamentally intractable. It is the simple fact that we have different values that creates the huge divides ever present in our society. However, I think that it by engaging in these discussions, by acknowledging every person’s humanity through their status as a moral being, we can bridge these gaps.