

“Stairway to Heaven”

It's north of 100 degrees and not even the best anti-perspirant can keep my sweat away. I'm standing outside the Knesset - Israeli Parliament. I'm with a tour group, but wasn't warned jean shorts aren't permitted inside. So, my thighs and I are stuck outside, left to wait like Moses in the throes of a stifling Jerusalem summer.

Faintly in the distance I hear the lyrics to a familiar song - Led Zepplin's "Stairway to Heaven." Surprised, I follow the melody, the notes progressively louder the closer I get to a grove of olive trees.

In the shade, there's a boy not much younger than me with an acoustic guitar, playing by himself. I pause to listen and he looks up, halting in the middle of the chorus.

"Would you like to join me?" he asks.

I sit down and cross my legs as he resumes playing. When the song finishes he looks up, "what'd you think?"

For a while we talk about music, how we both enjoy "Mumford and Sons" and our shared John Mayer obsession. There's a lull in the conversation and the tone shifts as the boy inquires, "have you been to the West Bank yet?"

I explain it isn't on our itinerary because of the wall and the violence on the Israeli/Palestinian border.

His face falls, "I just don't understand... how will there ever be any peace between us when there's a 25-foot wall in the way?"

In the moments that followed, my new friend Caleb opened up about his life in the most contentious city on Earth.

He talked of how important his faith was to him but how he didn't understand why his religion was being used to subjugate other people. He shared that Arabic isn't offered in Israeli public schools, so he saved his paychecks to take private lessons... and through watery eyes he opened up about his Palestinian girlfriend and how she's not allowed to visit him in Jerusalem.

Ironically, across the street from the very Parliament that built the wall, Caleb was sharing how he wanted to tear it down - not with violence, but through language, love, and conversation.

In a divided America - and increasingly divided world - his perspective is especially poignant. The end of this vortex of animosity and accusation begins with one person refusing to engage in the destructive impulses swirling all around us, choosing conversation over condemnation.

Caleb showed me I don't want to be a part of a generation that has an opinion about everything but doesn't want to work to change anything. If we want to change the world we have to make a case for it... and we have to decide it's going to start with us.