

# Holding Both: The dialectic of a life still unfolding



*Jeffrey E. Hansen, Ph.D.*

For much of my life, I believed that if I lived with integrity, worked hard, and walked faithfully, life would eventually become simpler. Not perfect, perhaps, but at least orderly. I assumed that commitment would bring clarity, that responsibility would produce stability, and that doing the right thing would eventually smooth the road ahead.

That belief was not naïve. It was shaped early through nearly a decade of military service and years within the Department of Defense. In those environments, integrity is not an abstract value. It is the foundation of trust, leadership, and identity. Your word matters. Your character matters. Responsibility is not something you step away from when circumstances become uncomfortable.

And for a long time, that framework made sense of the world.

Then life began to complicate it.

I started discovering that gratitude and grief often arrive together. That calling and cost rarely take

turns. That meaning is sometimes born from experiences we would never choose. I found myself holding truths that pulled in opposite directions, yet refused to separate.

There is a word for this way of living. Dialectic. Not a philosophical abstraction, but a human reality. The capacity to hold two truths at the same time without forcing one to erase the other.

I did not learn this in theory. I learned it by living it.

## **When conviction required my voice**

As I prepared to leave my role within the military system, one of the most painful chapters of my professional life unfolded. While serving at Madigan, I grew increasingly concerned about how issues of gender identity were being addressed with children. What troubled me was not compassion for suffering young people. It was the pace. Clinical conversations were accelerating toward affirmation and medical pathways without sustained exploration of trauma history, neurodevelopment, family systems, or long term psychological and medical risk.

At first, I wrestled quietly. Then more openly. Questions that once would have been welcomed began to feel inconvenient. Still, I could not ignore what I was seeing. As a psychologist, I am ethically bound to protect vulnerable populations. As a former Army officer, integrity demanded that I speak.

So I did. Not with hostility or politics, but with caution, humility, and depth. I asked whether we were moving faster than the science. Whether irreversible decisions deserved slower reflection. Whether protecting children sometimes requires patience more than certainty.



Eventually, I wrote a book addressing these ethical tensions. I was later able to speak with colleagues before the European Union Parliament, engaging in dialogue around these same concerns. Alongside respected and ethically minded peers, I co-authored two amicus briefs focused on preserving the integrity of medical ethics.

More recently, I had the unexpected honor of contributing to an amicus brief submitted to the United States Supreme Court, heard last October, with an opinion expected in April. None of this was pursued for recognition. It simply reflected how deeply I cared about protecting clinical judgment and the well-being of those we serve.

## **When conviction carried consequence**

Conviction, however, rarely comes without cost. Following the publication of my writing, formal allegations were initiated against me by a progressive colleague, escalating to the threat of my professional license. I found myself defending not merely my position, but my professional

existence. For someone whose life had been shaped by integrity, this was a profound moral injury.

I was shaken. I was frightened. I was wounded.

And yet even here, another dialectic emerged. Anger and compassion began sharing the same space. In the midst of fear and grief, God began softening my heart. I found myself praying for the individual who had initiated the accusations. Not because the harm was acceptable, and not because justice no longer mattered, but because bitterness threatened to become its own form of captivity.

Compassion did not excuse what happened. It simply freed me from carrying it forward.

## **Restoration without resolution**

That season eventually passed, though it left its mark. Later, I accepted the role of Clinical Director at Holdfast Recovery. It felt like restoration. I loved mentoring clinicians, training staff, and helping shape a developing clinical identity. As the organization expanded to include residential services and AnchorPoint, there was genuine joy in building something meaningful together.

During that season, I continued developing the NeuroFaith® model, exploring the intersection of neuroscience, psychology, and faith. The trademark was not about ownership, but stewardship. A way of protecting ideas forged through experience, failure, and grace.



Over time, however, another tension emerged. It was not ideological. It was structural. I carried immense responsibility with limited authority. Good people simply held different visions for the path forward.

There were no villains in that chapter. Only misalignment.

When I eventually chose to leave, I did so carrying both gratitude and disappointment. I wrote a letter blessing the staff, because even when we are hurt, we do not throw grenades down hallways we once walked with purpose.

## **The unexpected gifts of slowing down**

I assumed retirement would feel empty. Instead, it began with crisis. During my first week, my mother nearly died from double pneumonia and sepsis. I flew out to be with her alongside my brother and sister. In those hospital days, I was able to sit with her, read Scripture, pray, and simply be present. That availability would not have been possible at the pace of my former life.

Loss created presence. Pain opened purpose.

**Holding Both: The dialectic of a life still unfolding**

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In this slower season, I have begun seeing my wife Leah with new eyes. Her gift of hospitality, of opening her heart and home so others feel welcomed and safe, has taken on deeper meaning. I find myself dreaming of us laughing together, unhurried and fully present, as we step into this sunset chapter of life.



My family relationships have deepened as well. My older brother Ken has stepped fully into the role of big brother with steadiness and wisdom. My sister Karen, legally a stepsister but in every way a true sister, has shown loyalty beyond words. My adopted sisters Konomi and Saya, along with Konomi's children Alison and Kenneth Jr., have reminded me of the quiet holiness of simply showing up.

I am learning again how to live without hurry.

Life is not a straight ascent. It is a rhythm. Joy and sorrow. Calling and cost. Endings and beginnings held together.

This is the life I am learning to live now. Not choosing one truth over another. Not demanding resolution before understanding.

But learning, slowly and gratefully, how to hold both.

***There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.  
He has made everything beautiful in its time. Ecclesiastes 3:1, 11***