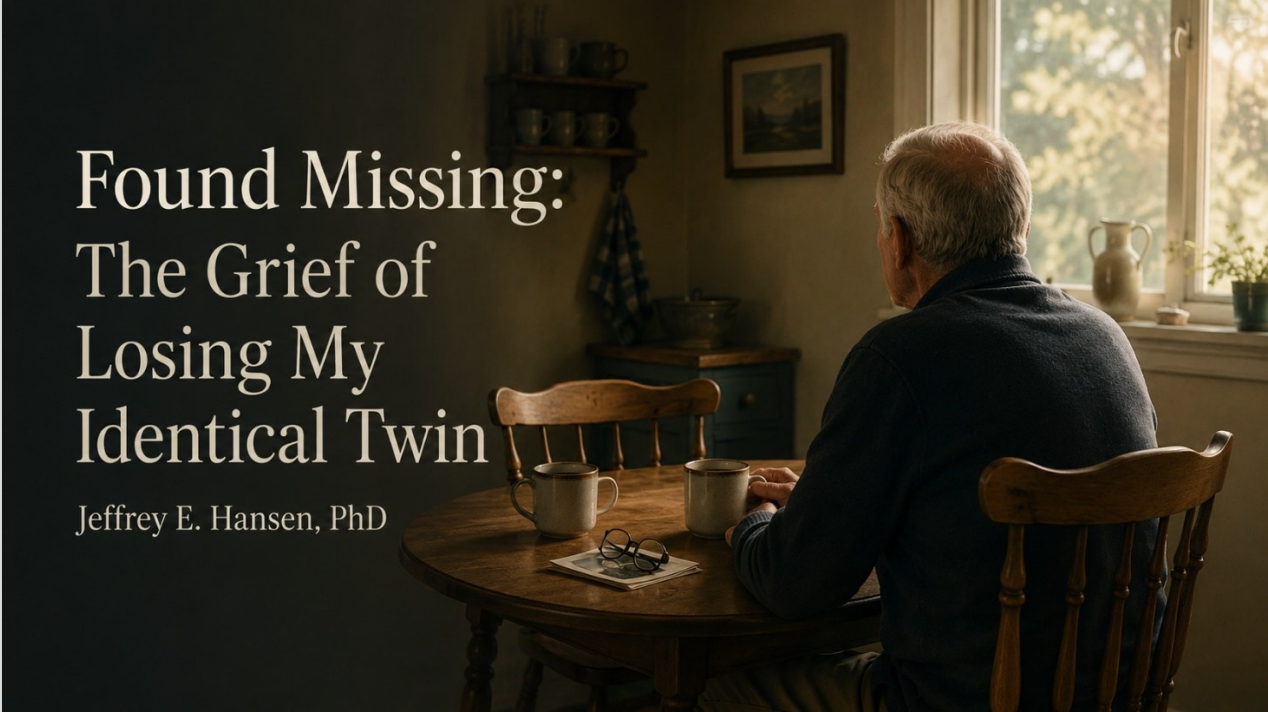


A photograph of an elderly man with grey hair, seen from behind, sitting at a round wooden table. He is looking out a window on the right side of the frame. On the table are two white mugs and a pair of glasses. The room is dimly lit, with light coming from the window. A small shelf with cups is visible on the wall to the left.

# Found Missing: The Grief of Losing My Identical Twin

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It is 9:55 on a Saturday evening, which is well past my bedtime. I am no longer a young man, and I generally hit the rack around nine. Perhaps it is the lateness of the hour. Perhaps it is the weekend. I sat alone in the quiet, trying to settle myself as the memories came flooding back.. Whatever the reason, my defenses are not quite as strong tonight, and I find myself returning to one word:

## *Missing.*

What does it truly mean to miss someone?

During the day, I work. I write. I help people. I push forward. I do what all of us must do when life has wounded us but has not stopped asking things of us. We set the pain aside, pull ourselves together, and attend to the work before us. There are people who need us. There are responsibilities that remain ours. There is still a life to be lived.

But sometimes, especially in the evening, the defenses grow tired. The noise of the day subsides, and what has been pushed to the edges returns to the center.

## **Tonight, I miss my identical twin brother, Gregg.**

It has been nearly two years and ten months since Gregg died. On October 11, 2023, I walked through the door after work and saw my wife, Leah. My sweet wife already knew what I did not. She had been given the terrible burden of telling me that my brother was gone.

She broke the news with extraordinary tenderness. She said it with all the kindness, care, and love a human being could bring to such an impossible moment.

## **We had lost Gregg.**

Lost. There is another strange word.

When someone dies, people reach for words because they love us and desperately want to help. They tell us they are sorry for our loss. They say our loved one is no longer in pain. They remind us that the person will always be with us. These words are offered sincerely, and they matter. Yet no words can fully enter that place where the pain lives.

We say someone is lost, as though he might somehow be found. We say he is missing because there is now an empty place where he should be.

Perhaps that is what missing means. Love still reaches instinctively for someone and discovers, again and again, that he is not there.

Losing an identical twin occupies a territory of grief that very few people can fully understand. Gregg was not simply my brother. We entered this world together. We shared the same beginning, the same face, and the same DNA. Before either of us had language, we had one another.

When he died, it felt as though half of my DNA had been ripped out from under me. Something elemental was torn away. I remained alive, but the human being who had always been part of my understanding of myself was suddenly gone.

I am now left to live the life that Gregg could not continue living. In some way, I feel called to heal the wounds for both of us.

## **God, he was a good brother!**

When I went through my own Waterloo, when my life had become almost unbearably difficult, Gregg was there for me sacrificially. He encouraged me. He stood beside me. He helped carry me through a time of travail when I was struggling to believe I could keep going.

I wish I could have done the same for him.

That may be one of the most painful parts of grieving someone whose life ended when he lost all hope. The mind keeps returning to what might have been done. What did I miss? What could I have said? Why could I not reach him? Why could I not give back the help he had once given me?

## **God, I wanted to help him.**

But disconnection is powerful. When someone retreats deeply into pain and closes the door behind him, love may remain outside calling his name, but love cannot always force that door open. When a person's suffering becomes greater than his remaining firepower, greater than his defenses, and greater than his ability to imagine another tomorrow, the pain can overwhelm everything else.

I do not blame Gregg for that. I believe I understand at least a little of what happened within him. I also know that I could not make him receive help he could no longer allow himself to receive.

Still, understanding does not remove the ache.

Nothing makes his death acceptable. Nothing makes the absence painless. Nothing neatly resolves the grief of wanting one more conversation, one more embrace, or one more opportunity to say, *"Brother, let me carry some of this with you."*

So, what am I to do with all this love that remains?

I think I must give it somewhere to go.

I will take what I could not do for Gregg and offer it to others. I will try to reach people in pain whom his memory has given me the motivation to reach. If I can make one ounce of difference in another person's life, in a way I could not make that difference for my brother, it will not erase the pain, but it will help me carry it.

That sorrow is present in *The Shadow of Shame*. It is present in *When Duty Called*. It is present when I sit with veterans, first responders, people battling addiction, wounded young people, and families who fear losing someone they love. It is present whenever I try to help another human being remain on this side of things.

Gregg's death did not make those books possible in some simplistic or sentimental sense. I would surrender every word to have my brother back. But because I cannot change what happened, I can allow my love for him to become part of what moves me toward others.

I can let it deepen my compassion.

I can let it sharpen my awareness of pain that hides beneath competence, humor, strength, and apparent success.

I can let it remind me that even good and capable men can exhaust their defenses.

I can continue saying to wounded people what I wish I could still say to my brother:

*"You are not alone. Your pain is real, but it does not get the final word. Let me sit with you until the firepower returns."*

Perhaps this is what it means to make friends with grief. I do not welcome it, and I will never call it good. But I can stop demanding that it leave before I continue living. I can carry it beside me. I can listen when it speaks. I can allow it to remind me of how profoundly I loved and was loved.

Tonight, the missing is especially strong.

So, Gregg, I will say directly what my heart has been trying to say all evening.

*I love you, brother. God, I miss you. I wish I could have reached you. I wish I could have helped heal your wounds as you helped me survive mine. I could not do for you*

*what I so desperately wanted to do, and I will carry that sorrow for the remainder of my life.*

**But I will also carry your love.**

I will take what I could not give to you and offer it to others in your honor. I will live faithfully on this side of things for as long as God calls me to remain here. I will continue writing, serving, loving, and reaching toward people in pain.

I will do this because I love you.

I will do it because I love my Lord Jesus.

And I will hold fast to the hope that, when my own work here is finished in God's time, you and I will meet again.

**Until then, brother, you are loved.**

**And you are profoundly, unimaginably missed.**