



**Loveable: Embracing What is Truest about You,
So You Can Truly Embrace Your Life**

By Kelly Flanagan

Reviewed by Nancy Eichhorn, PhD

Reading transforms me. When an author's voice resonates in my entire being, I'm hooked. I crave, I want, I read. And when the book (or blog, paper, article) is done, only then am I satisfied. Sometimes, that is.

Other times, well, some books feel so real that I stall. I stop reading because I don't want to experience the inevitable sadness I know will come once I've read the last page. I fuse with the story, my life now part of the characters' lives. I slip into their world as one. I miss them and wonder where they go from the conclusion. Though I must admit there's never a true ending in my world—I muse about the characters' next steps, and, if the book is truly engaging, I wonder about my next steps, too.

Loveable is such a book.

I received an advance reviewer's copy quite some time ago and simply didn't want it to end. The author, Kelly Flanagan, speaks my language. I started following his blog, *Untangled*, several years ago. How did I happen to find it? I offer that divine guidance played a part. My faith. My belief that there is a higher power in play and things happen for reasons I'm not always savvy about but in the end surrender and accept what is. And yes, God is part of this book . . . in many ways.

Kelly's passion is writing. He's a clinical psychologist, a husband, father, family member and friend. His time was wrapped around responsibility and at the end of the day, writing lacked priority. But words came to him and eventually he started

blogging. He shares his “writing” story –his first blog, the move to a smaller town giving his wife space to do what she loved and he space to write . . . his passion and his purpose, his art and his voice, his grace on the page: “The book was what fanned the embers of spark within me, but there was not time to write it” (163). So, they made time. And his words reach audiences in amazing ways.

I can easily imagine how a letter he wrote to his young daughter, Caitlin, who was three years old at the time, about worthiness and relationships went viral after he posted it on his blog (the letter was triggered by a Google search for a coffee pot that resulted in how to keep a man interested that involved a woman’s body and her obedience). A week later another letter to Caitlin about worthiness and how you can’t buy it off the shelf (make-up this time) but rather you need to discover it from within went viral, so much so Kelly and Caitlin landed on the Today show.

Why does one father writing to his daughter create such intense interest?

According to Kelly “ . . . it’s not just little girls who need to be reminded of their inner beauty—all of us need to be reminded of our worthiness and the power we have to live beautiful lives” (pg. 11).

Kelly speaks to the inner child alive in all of us—regardless of gender. His stories resonate with core concerns of all human beings: worthiness (and overcoming our shame), belonging (creating satisfying relationships) and purpose (why we are here and what we are meant to do in this life). It doesn’t matter if he’s writing a letter to his sons Aidan and Quinn or to complete strangers. It doesn’t matter if he’s sharing stories about his own vulnerabilities and lessons learned personally and professionally as clients share their relationship woes and lack of purpose. Kelly writes directly to your soul, the inner most being within you; some may call it Spirit or Self (it is certainly not your Ego, which Kelly also addresses with humor and compassion). Regardless of the label you assign this inner being, it is here in the warm soft vulnerable underbelly of our existence that our suffering stems from past experiences that left us feeling unworthy, unlovable, isolated, alone, a drift without a reason for being alive.



The stories are engaging, and they stay with you. I see the kitchen table scene with Caitlin up earlier than usual reading and Kelly assuming he will get his typical morning hug but . . . Caitlin puts her hands up and stops him. Now he had a choice: be upset (feel rejected, perhaps superceded by her power over his “dominion” as father of the house—all Ego based stuff according to Kelly) or he could (as a therapist, which is where he went) see the value and the glory of his young daughter setting a clear boundary about who can and who cannot touch her, and hear the power of her No so that she can actually have a clear Yes. Kelly explores extensions, the what ifs, and how this moment could be considered an awakening that in years to come will

support Caitlin when she's asked to hop into the backseat of a boyfriend's car—she will know that she has the choice and the voice to say yes or no and to feel safe in her power. As well, Kelly explains that boundaries and power can be expressed with love; they don't have to be angry battles but rather a peaceful presence of Self.

Writing this review, the stories are filtering through my memory, part of my personal archive, readily accessible. I suspect the themes Kelly discussed are rambling about in my body as well, feelings of Self and worthiness, a sense of belonging. Reading always triggers my "stuff", and I look for what's to come. Sitting at the dinner table with my elderly parents I shared a feeling I had had over the weekend while at our cabin in the woods. It was supposed to be a girls' getaway (5 other women were invited) to howl at the full moon, do our goddess thing, and complete two winter ascents (we're all-season-peak-climbers when conditions are safe). Turns out I snowshoed to the summit alone, watched the full moon rise over the lake and howled alone, and I struggled with feeling happy and feeling something else, clearly not happy. I tried to force myself to appreciate the beauty of being alone and how lucky I was to have this gorgeous weekend and how friends invited me to join them for dinner and I met new people. I accepted that I was where I was supposed to be, doing what I was supposed to be doing and appreciated the grace in the moment. And, I truly had a great weekend.



Until I saw several of the other women who were unable to attend post pictures of their girls' getaway on Facebook. Their event was preplanned before mine, and I had not been invited. My heart sunk. Processing this experience with my parents, my 87-year-old mom nailed it. "You felt left out," she said, "and that's different than choosing to be alone." Yep, loneliness—residue from feeling left out—comes when one feels

unworthy, unwanted, unlovable, while being alone in my life comes from a place of strength and self-acceptance and self-validation. This issue has been a bummer for me most of my life and now, between reading Kelly's stories, processing his experiencing and in turn my own, I had a realization that allowed me to release bodily tension that's been churning in my belly for far too many years.

For me, a good book stimulates something within myself. Even reading a fun fiction novel, I find myself changed by the outcome of the events, even if it's just having a good laugh or a heartfelt cry. There's emotion there and with emotions come motion and the movement is a release of something holding on inside of me. When we learn to be present in our body and trace the feelings/emotions, connect,

express, we release and move on. Kelly's stories reach out to me and touch me, a tap on the shoulder as if to say, hey what about this? A tug on my heart, as if to hug me and let me know I am enough, I matter: "You don't need to be *more*; you just need to be more *you*" . . . "It's okay to be ordinary you" (pg. 33).

One sticking point for me right now is this sense of purpose. I tried to sit quietly and listen for the grace that Kelly writes about, those moments when grace happens and you have an awakening or realization (like my differentiating loneliness and being alone). The voice of grace, Kelly writes, doesn't challenge the "half truths" spoken by shame to keep us feeling less than but rather it offers "the whole truth" . . . "The voice of grace doesn't challenge the story I've been told by my shame—it totally subverts it by reminding me of the rest of the story" (pg. 91).

Kelly writes about what he calls an inciting incident—when you hear the voice of grace whispering within and see your true self for the first time. We experience grace (it's not a cognitive concept to be discussed or explained), and we need to listen to it as it arises from within. Part of this involves our sense of purpose. As Kelly notes: "When you yearn to know why you're here, you are honoring the very essence of your humanity" . . . "We are here to live with intention and purpose" (pg. 32).

I've been asking "Who am I? and is who I am good enough?" most of life. There are moments when I feel the completeness, sense the value of my being simply because I am. And there are times I ponder my role here, what am I supposed to be doing (of service, of value) as part of my community, part of my world? What will matter?

Kelly addresses this with poignant stories and suggestions, he even offers what he says may come close to "declaring something a rule" : "where our most vibrant passion meets our most visceral pain, we discover a sense of purpose" (pg. 214). In effect, "our passion becomes our purpose when it redeems our pain" he writes.

"Passion," he writes, "isn't about proving your worth, attracting a crowd, or saving the world. It is about responding to the great ache and the mysterious affection inside of you. It's about turning your insides out until the good and beautiful thing inside of you spills out into the world" (pg. 187). "Yet, whenever we pursue a passion that is an authentic expression of our true self, we will also experience misfortune, disappointment, hardship and pain. Because when we're pursuing our passions, our souls are out there, exposed, vulnerable."

My work today, I guess, is to sit quietly more often. Listen for Grace, hear her words, perhaps in a gentle breeze, in a leaf opening to greet Spring, in a bird's call, a dog's bark, a client's question, a publisher's response, a writer's inquiry, my own stories talking to me at 2 am when all around me are soundly sleeping. My purpose will become clear . . .

I leave you with one more paragraph from Kelly's book that captured one concept we as therapists hear much about parenting—their role in an infant's brain development and emotional development, the sense of I that comes through healthy relationships. He writes it simply, completely:

"As children, our whole lives are a question asked: Will you be my mirror? Will you see me deeply enough, and abide with me steadily enough, to reflect back to me who I am and who I am becoming? If we are seen and mirrored well by the people we love, our life ceases to be a question asked and becomes an answer lived. If we are mirrored well. The problem is, most of our mirrors—the people who could have reflected our hearts back to us—were cracked. Those we looked to for mirroring were, for the most part, not bad people; they were broken people" (77).

A book well written. A book well received.



Kelly Flanagan is a licensed clinical psychologist and co-founder of Artisan Clinical Associates in Naperville, IL. In 2012, he discovered writing was the thing he never knew he always wanted to do, so he began the now popular blog, *UnTangled*, where he writes weekly about the redemption of our personal, relational and global lives. He is married to another clinical psychologist who is also named Kelly, (just a tad bit confusing). The Kellies—as they are called by friends and family—have three children and they have a deal with them: they teach the kids up to grow up and the kids teach them how to grow young. You can learn more at www.dr.kellyflanagan.com

