
Loveable

*Embracing What Is Truest About You,
So You Can Truly Embrace Your Life*

Study Guide

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INTRODUCTION

Sometime last summer, I wound up on my hands and knees in a hardware store parking lot.

I can't remember what I was fixing, but I do remember I was in the middle of a DIY home repair and a screw had gotten stripped. Probably by me. I couldn't find a replacement in the big box of random nails, screws, brackets, and drywall anchors where I typically search for such things. So, I got in the car and drove to our local Ace hardware store. I pulled into the parking lot, grabbed the screw from the cup holder, put it in the pocket of my gym shorts, and walked briskly into the store, making a beeline for the hardware aisle. Upon arrival, I reached into my pocket for the screw. But I couldn't feel the screw.

All I could feel was a hole in my pocket.

I uttered some loud hybrid of a grunt and a curse, vowed never to buy gym shorts at Walmart ever again, and slowly began to retrace my steps. The floors were clean and clear of debris and it seemed clear that the screw had not fallen out indoors. I exited the store into the hot noonday sun and walked to my car, scanning the black asphalt for the missing screw.

Nothing.

I was getting angrier and more desperate by the minute, so I thought for a moment or two about my dignity, and then decided I didn't care. I got down on all fours and lowered my head to the pavement, pressing my right cheek against the blistering ground, hoping that from that perspective the screw would be easier to see. No screw. I shuffled along the ground, changing positions, lowering my head once again, scanning.

No screw.

This went on for a little while. Most people gave me odd looks and a wide berth. One older woman stopped and asked if she could help. I was tempted to ask her how she knew I had a screw loose. Instead, I thanked her and declined the offer. Ten minutes later, I gave up. The screw was

nowhere to be found. I stood up, defeated, and walked toward my car. After several steps, I noticed something. Near the bottom seam of my shorts, I could feel a strange weight and something bumping against my leg as I walked. The screw had fallen through the hole in my pocket and into the leg of the shorts itself. I had thought it was missing, and had searched everywhere for it, but it had been with me all along. Why do I tell you this story at the beginning of a study guide for a book about embracing your truest, worthiest, most loveable self?

Because, for most of us, our truest, worthiest, most loveable self is like that screw—we search far and wide for it in the parking lot of life, when it was never really missing to begin with. It has been with us all along, tucked away somewhere deep inside, just waiting to be discovered once again.

If you have not yet read *Loveable*—and you are using this study guide to work your way through it for the first time—you will soon understand exactly what I mean by that, and you will soon know exactly how good that news is. On the other hand, if you have read *Loveable* already—and you plan to use this study guide to re-read it, or to simply deepen your understanding and experience of it—then you already understand what I mean.

Either way, what I'm trying to say is, welcome to the *Loveable* study guide!

How to Use This Study Guide

I hope you will use this study guide in whatever way is most helpful to you. Having said that, I've organized it with a few ideas in mind, and I want to share those with you before you get started. This guide can be used for both individual study and group study. Here, I will focus on individual study. Later in this guide there is a chapter with suggestions for group study.

First, the study questions are divided into four sets, corresponding to each of the four major sections of *Loveable*: The Backstory, Worthiness, Belonging, and Purpose. Though some of the questions cite specific excerpts and page numbers from the book, I would encourage you to complete the whole section of *Loveable* before going back and answering the questions for that section. I believe your self-examination and reflection will be richer and more rewarding if you wait to answer the questions until you have become familiar with all of the ideas in that particular section.

Second, honesty takes time, even when it is honesty with ourselves. Give yourself plenty of time to work through the study questions. There is no rush. The next section of *Loveable* will be

patiently waiting for you when you are ready. Some of the questions will be challenging, as they pertain to oftentimes difficult life experiences. Give yourself the time and space to sort through what you are thinking and feeling. If you find yourself at any point in your study unclear about how to respond, or simply “stuck” in the process of working through the questions, this might be a cue to reach out for help, either from a trusted confidante, or a professional. We are standing by and ready to help!

Third, each section of study questions ends with an “Additional Notes” section. This blank area may be the most important part of this study guide. The questions that I’ve provided for you may not be the questions you most need to be asked. If that’s the case, list in these sections the questions you need to answer. Or use the space to list new thoughts, feelings, or ideas that have arisen during the reading or the study. The most important thing is not to censor yourself. Any insight is fair game, any healing welcome, any growth something to be celebrated.

And There’s More...

When you have concluded your study, be sure to check out the “Group Guidelines” and “For Further Study” chapters. This study guide is just one component of a much larger *Loveable Study Experience*, including a free year-long guide of additional readings, practices, and audio discussions that will come alongside you as you embrace what is truest about you, so you can truly embrace your life. Thanks for joining us on the journey, friend.

The Backstory

1. In *Loveable* (pg. 18), Kelly writes, “For millennia, the word *shame* has connoted dishonor and disrepute. Still today, we tend to think of shame as a rare, complicated, and disgraceful emotion. But shame is not rare; it is actually quite common, even universal. And shame is not terribly complicated either. Shame is simply the belief we are not enough.” **If you had to complete the sentence, “I am not _____ enough,” how would you complete it? What does this tell you about the ordinary shame you experience?**

2. On page 20, Kelly writes, “Disappointment is the most common delivery system for shame, like a Trojan horse you roll into a kid’s heart. When night falls, shame climbs out. I love my son, but I’ve unintentionally rolled Trojan horses into his heart.” **Can you recall a time someone was disappointed in you? In what way did it make you feel like you were not good enough?**

3. Because we spend most of our lives trying not to feel our shame, sometimes we may find ourselves at a loss about how to become aware of it again. Here are some questions to contemplate. **When you were young, what are some of the ways you felt unseen, unknown, or misunderstood? What are some of the good things that others have pointed out about you, that you sometimes have difficulty seeing in yourself?**

4. Can you complete the following sentence? “I feel most loveable when someone _____.” **When they don’t do that, how do you feel? How do you react to them? What might this tell you about how you are depending upon others for a sense of worthiness, rather than claiming it for yourself?**

5. On page 29, Kelly writes, “Initially, we believe we will find our worthiness within the relatively confined territory of our relationships. But when the search comes up empty, we start expanding it into the rest of life. Our search for worthiness ripples outward in concentric circles as we try to prove our worth through influence, impact, and significance—by making a name for ourselves, we hope to make ourselves worthy. Our shame tells us that by doing something that matters, *we* will finally matter.” **What are your worthiness projects? What do you pour your energy into in the hope that by doing something that is *more* than enough, you will finally *be* enough?**

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

ACT I: Worthiness

1. In *Loveable* (pg. 51), Kelly writes, “The worldview in which I was raised had taught me that human beings are all basically bad to the bone and sinful to the center...But [referring to his clinical work] every time—every time—as we dug through the ugliness, we found beauty at the bottom instead. Without exception, going deep with my clients ended not with unmitigated darkness, but the discovery of an inalterable, holy light.” **How is this consistent or inconsistent with your worldview? Is your understanding of humanity dominated more by the concept of original sin or the imago Dei? How does this affect your sense of worthiness?**

2. On page 68, Kelly writes, “In our first act, we don’t ultimately become who we are; we *unbecome* who we are *not*...We don’t need a ladder to construct who we are supposed to be; we need an oxygen mask to resuscitate who we’ve always been. We don’t need to build; we simply need to breathe. Our breath, it turns out, is one of the best tools we have...Can you sense what a great act of faith this is? To stop all of your doing and to simply breathe, even for ten minutes, when you still believe your doing is what makes you worthy?” **Have you ever tried to stop doing for ten minutes and to simply be, to simply breathe? What was hard about it? What was rewarding? If you have not tried it, what is daunting about it? What do you hope will happen?**

3. On page 80, Kelly writes, “What if instead of trying *look* good, you spent some time searching for the uncertain little kid within, so you could assure that child he or she *is* good? What if you have a little one inside of you just waiting for a parent to see them and mirror them, and what if *you* could be that parent?” **What has the little kid in you been longing to hear all these years? What does that little kid need to hear about his or her worthiness? What do you wish other people would say about you, and how might you begin to say that to yourself?**

4. On page 93, Kelly writes, “I used to believe grace was a way of being saved; now I know grace is a way of being *seen*. Grace isn’t an idea or a doctrine or an escape hatch. It’s not a noun at all. Grace is a *verb*. Grace is a *happening*. Grace is what happens when that gentle voice inside us—and the tender voices around us—tell us about the beautiful soul we *already are*, regardless of how much mess we’re covered with.” **Have you ever heard this voice of grace inside of you? Has anyone ever been the voice of grace to you? If so, what did that voice say? How did it assure you of your worthiness?**

5. On page 96, Kelly describes a scene he has witnessed in his therapy office with countless clients: “...the joy of worthiness [overcomes] all the conditioning that says we aren’t supposed to delight in who we are. But then the shame training kicks in. Sheepishness quickly returns. Eyes are cast downward. Lips straighten out and clamp down. Muttered apologies are issued. The moment of joy gets minimized. Retracted. Qualifications are made. Self-negation replaces self-revelation. Worthiness is buried once again in the bedside table of a human heart, and I try to reach for the drawer before it snaps completely shut. I tell this good soul I was enjoying hearing about its worthiness--I was delighting in it too--and I wonder why it so swiftly went back into hiding. Invariably, the answer comes back: it’s arrogant to reveal the things about which you are proud--my parents said so, my peers think so, and my pastor taught me so. It’s cocky to believe, let alone *say*, good things about yourself. **In what ways were you taught to hide, deny, or dismiss the delightful things about who you are? Can you name one or two things that are delightful about you? It is not arrogant to claim the truth about your goodness and your beauty. How are you beautiful on the inside?**

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

ACT II: Belonging

1. In *Loveable* (pg. 113), Kelly writes, “Loneliness happens. It is as much a part of life as hunger and sunsets and funerals...Loneliness is the seed from which true togetherness can spring, if we cease to hide it and learn to reveal it, if we cease to be ashamed of it and learn to be connected in the midst of it.” **When do you feel the loneliest? Have you ever concluded that you were lonely because there was something wrong with you? If you were aware that everyone feels at least a little loneliness all the time, what would you do differently when you feel lonely?**

2. On page 114, Kelly writes, “Reflexively and unconsciously, we concluded our true self was the cause of our loneliness. We decided our true self was not worthy of closeness and togetherness, not worthy of belonging. So we began building *another* self. A false self. Then we buried our true self beneath it. Though we have no idea we’ve done it.” He goes on to describe our false self—our ego—as a castle with walls, cannons, and a throne. **How did this metaphor help you to see how you use pretending, protecting, and/or perfecting as a way to hide your true self? How have those behaviors unintentionally backfired, resulting in even more conflict and loneliness? Did you find any of the other metaphors for the false self—a chrysalis, a tomb, or a bodyguard—more helpful?**

3. Boundaries are the language of belonging. Kelly suggests over the course of several chapters that healthy boundaries are the building blocks of true belonging. And on page 134, he writes, “Our families are where we first learn how to say no in a safe and supportive environment. If we don’t learn to do so there, it is difficult to learn it anywhere else.” **When you were young, how did the adults react when you would say no? Were you allowed to set boundaries? Were you given guidance about how to, or how not to, set healthy boundaries? How do those experiences continue to affect your way of setting boundaries today?**

4. Kelly writes that the most painful part of finding belonging is letting go of people who cannot or will not see our worthiness: “Usually, our circles [of belonging] must shrink before they expand.” **Are there people in your life who you’ve been trying to prove your worth to for a long time? What would it look like to have healthier boundaries with them? How might you begin to let them go?**

5. Who do you feel like you truly belong to? **What are the qualities of that relationship that make you feel like you belong? Are both of you able to have a voice in the relationship? How do you negotiate the complexity of both having your own, sometimes conflicting, boundaries? How do they delight in you? How do you delight in them? In what ways can you count upon each other in times of need?**

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

ACT III: Purpose

1. In *Loveable* (pg. 180), Kelly writes, “The voice of shame says our passions, if they are going to matter, must be earth-shattering or world-changing. It subtly substitutes performance for passion and then pawns it off as the real deal.” **When you hear the phrase, ‘Find your passion,’ what does it make you think about? Do you associate practicing your passion with performing extraordinarily? How might that be interfering with discovering your actual purpose?**

2. Most of us will take a lifetime to clarify our true passions. Along the way, we invest heavily—in the form of time, energy, and money—in many other ventures, sometimes leaving us a little afield of the things we truly love to do. **What have you loved to do since childhood? How could you make practicing that passion a more regular part of your life? What investments would you have to write off, what commitments would you have to change, in order to do so?**

3. On page 198, Kelly writes, “To have courage is simply to be who you are at your core and to follow your passions. It’s not a character trait; it’s a *direction*. People aren’t born with courage; people are born with passions—things we’re here to do. Courage is simply the decision to move toward them. So, true courage, to the observer, might look quite mundane, because it’s ordinary people doing the ordinary things they are here to do. Just one teeny, tiny step at a time.” **If you know what your passion is, or even if you have just an inkling of something you’ve been longing to do, what is one teeny, tiny step you could take toward it? How could you draw upon your circles of belonging for en-courage-ment and support?**

4. On page 203, Kelly writes, “We human beings tend to treat our circumstances like divining rods, using good fortune and hardship to determine if we’re on the right path and in good favor with the powers—or the Power—that be.” **Do you ever slip into this human tendency to guess at God’s favor based upon whether your luck is breaking good or bad?** In the same chapter, Kelly writes, “After all, sacrifice isn’t the way *to* heaven; sacrifice is the way *of* heaven.” **Is there something you are so passionate about doing that you are, or would be, willing to suffer through it when it’s not going well?**

5. On page 214, Kelly writes, “What I’m about to say is the closest I’ll ever get to declaring something a rule: where our most vibrant passion meets our most visceral pain, we discover a sense of purpose...our passion becomes our purpose when it redeems our pain...Purpose is what inevitably happens when your passion heals something that has been wounded, repairs something that has been broken, resurrects something that has died, or redeems something that has gone awry.” **If you have discovered your passion, are you aware of what pain from your story your passion could redeem? Or, similarly, do you have a wound in need of healing? How might you go about redeeming that pain, and what does that tell you about what you might be most passionate about?**

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

GROUP GUIDELINES

I'm thrilled that you are interested in studying *Loveable* as a group! I believe a group study can provide valuable support, accountability, and wisdom, especially for a book like *Loveable*. Once again, I hope your group will use the study questions in whatever way serves you best, and once again I have a few suggestions.

First, *Loveable* study groups may range in size from two to approximately eight people. Because the ideas discussed in *Loveable*—and thus the experiences shared in the group—are relatively personal, limiting the group size is important for maintaining a sense of safety. *Loveable* is ideal for existing small groups in which trust has already been established. However, *Loveable* can also be studied in groups newly formed for the specific purpose of studying the book. In this case, it is important to plan at least one introductory meeting, before beginning the study. In this meeting, focus on getting to know each other and getting to know the reasons for each person's interest in the study. People are often drawn to a study of *Loveable* for similar reasons, and articulating these shared reasons can help to quickly establish connection and common ground.

Second, with regard to safety, it is important that group leaders be clear about the confidential nature of the group and the trust each member is putting in every other member with regard to the privacy of information shared. It is also important that each member be giving their full attention to any member who is speaking and sharing. Cell phone use should be prohibited and other distractions minimized as much as possible. By doing so, you will be communicating something important about the worthiness of every person in the group.

Third, the four-part nature of *Loveable* lends itself to a four-session group study. Sessions of 90 minutes to two hours are ideal. I would recommend spacing meetings out with two weeks in between to give members time for independent reading and study. In other words, I would encourage group leaders to think of the group study as building upon the individual study, by asking group members to have completed their reading and their reflection upon the questions prior to the meeting. In this way, group members will come prepared to each group meeting, having already begun to think through their reactions to that session's material.

Fourth, in each session, once members have been greeted and welcomed, each member might be encouraged to share (within 60 seconds) one thing for which they have been grateful since the last meeting. During this time of sharing, the other members are encouraged to listen rather than comment or respond. This reinforces the idea that, in group studies, listening is as important as speaking.

Fifth, in study groups like this, some introverted members tend to stay quiet, while other more extroverted members will dominate the discussion. There is nothing wrong with this; it is a perfectly normal group dynamic. However, especially with a book like *Loveable*, sometimes the quietest members of the group have some of the most valuable contributions to make to the group discussion. In order to encourage this kind of balance, group leaders may give each member a slip of paper with their name on it. The first time a member speaks, he or she puts his or her name in the center of the group. No member may speak a second time until each member has had one chance to speak and thus everyone's name has been placed in the center of the group. Once every person has spoken, all of the names may be retrieved from the center. Group leaders may choose to do this once at the beginning of each session, repeatedly throughout the session, or not at all. Whatever the decision, group leaders are encouraged to get approval for this format from the group members before beginning.

Fifth, it is not necessary to cover every question during the group study. It is up to the group leader to decide when the conversation has gotten sidetracked and thus redirect it. It is also up to the group leader to decide when the conversation is going deeply and productively into one topic and thus encourage it. If this happens, note which questions were not discussed and survey group members to see if there is interest in an additional meeting to discuss those questions.

Sixth, group members may benefit from a brief time at the end of each session to summarize aloud their takeaways from the session. Leaders can use this time to see if there are any requests for prayer or support from other group members. Leaders may also solicit from the group at this point feedback about the session and any suggestions for adjusting the process at the next session. And that really is the spirit of this study guide: trust the voice of grace whispering within you, listen to your inner wisdom, and tailor any of it and all of it to the needs of you and your group. It will be worth it, because *all* of you are worth it.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Wait, there's more!

You've now read *Loveable*, and you've gone more deeply into it, either through an individual study or a group study, or both. Now, if you are interested in continuing to cultivate the experiences you've begun to have in the midst of your reading and study, you can. I've created for you a weekly reading, practice, and audio discussion that will take your *Loveable* experience to a whole new level. You can take the weekly content at your own pace so that you move through it in exactly a year, or you can take breaks as needed and complete it on a schedule that is best for you. It's all free, and you can find it at drkellyflanagan.com/the-lovable-study-experience/.

Whatever you choose to do, just remember, you are loveable.