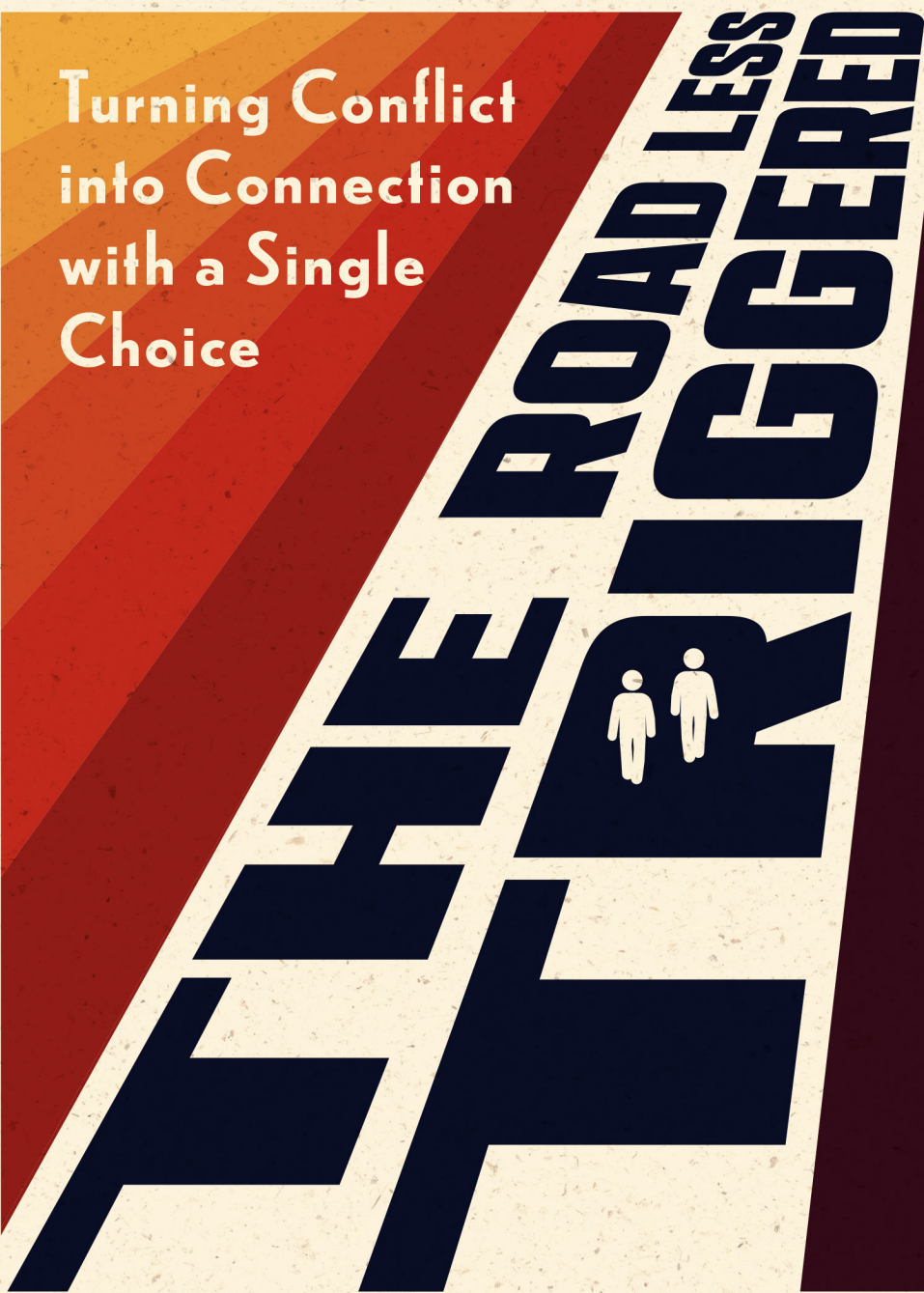


Turning Conflict
into Connection
with a Single
Choice

THE UNLOGGED ROAD LESS

The title 'THE UNLOGGED ROAD LESS' is written in a large, bold, blue, sans-serif font, slanted upwards from left to right. The letter 'U' in 'UNLOGGED' is uniquely designed, containing two white silhouettes of human figures standing side-by-side. The background features diagonal stripes in shades of orange and red.

DR. KELLY FLANAGAN

“*Loveable* helped me shift from deep self-loathing to radical self-acceptance. In *The Road Less Triggered*, Dr. Kelly Flanagan goes even further—reawakening my commitment to live openhearted in a world that often teaches us to shut down. This book is practical, poetic, and deeply personal. Kelly doesn’t just point to the path—he walks it and invites us to walk it too. I’ll be recommending this one for years to come.”

Eric Deschamps, business and leadership coach, Rhapsody Strategies; cohost, *Living Richly* podcast; creator, The Foundry

“No one names the thing beneath the thing quite like Dr. Kelly Flanagan. In *The Road Less Triggered*, he walks with us into the unseen terrains of our hearts, illuminating the hidden patterns that spark conflict and dim connection. Through his steady, peace-filled wisdom, he offers not quick fixes but practices that reshape us from the inside out. This is a book to savor, return to, and be changed by—again and again.”

Ashton Gustafson, host, *Good / True / & Beautiful* podcast

“James 1:19 tells us to ‘be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.’ In *The Road Less Triggered*, Dr. Flanagan gives us the path to living out this verse. This book is not another ‘conflict’ book. Instead, Dr. Flanagan walks with us on a path to a deeper understanding of ourselves and why we do what we do, which will result in healthier, more compassionate relationships.”

Kim Kimberling, PhD, president, Awesome Marriage

“*The Road Less Triggered* is a gold mine of real-life insights and relatable examples for navigating our triggers. It’s a firm, humbling reminder that while it’s easy to blame the world around us, true peace comes only from looking inward.”

Brian Macdonald, Judah & the Lion

“Dr. Kelly Flanagan has a gift for making the hard stuff feel doable. *The Road Less Triggered* doesn’t just explain why we get stuck in the same arguments—it shows us how to pause, stay open, and choose connection when it matters most. As a dad, this isn’t just personal growth—it’s about modeling calm and compassion so our kids grow up in homes that feel safe and connected. This is a book I’ll be handing to friends who want more peace and depth at home.”

Jon Vroman, founder, Front Row Dads

“As a client of Kelly’s, I’ve gained insight each time we have spoken. I thought, *What more could I possibly learn? Surely I have all of these tools?* And yet, I learned MORE goodness to add into my relationships. Specifically, I learned that I not only need to CURE my heart after it closes, I also need to feel the CARE for my heart in order for it to open back up. In a world full of quick fixes and making problems ‘go away,’ Kelly guides us into understanding and practicing an open heart. This tiny little tidbit is just a

Dr. Kelly Flanagan, *The Road Less Triggered*
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small piece of the bigger picture that was gleaned from *The Road Less Triggered*, yet it allowed me to communicate my needs in such a simple and understandable way.”

Jamie Lee Sheils, *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author; cohost,
18 Summers Podcast for Parents; roadschooling trophy mom of
five; soulmate to a feral entrepreneur

“Reading *Man’s Search for Meaning* many years ago was one of the most powerful events of my life. ‘Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response.’ This principle was etched within my soul immediately and opened new doors of possibility. Still within all its wisdom, and with all my efforts over the years, I learned it was harder to grasp and follow through on than expected, until now. For the first time, thanks to this book, I finally feel equipped to be able to put this foundational principle to work consistently and effectively in all areas of my life. Kelly has simplified the sciences around Frankl’s work with step by step guides, along with real stories of people achieving true peace of mind, success, and the power of living with an open heart.”

Jim Sheils, lucky father, husband, *Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today* bestselling author

“We know we need help. We lose our tempers. We snap at strangers and hurt the ones we love. And we keep doing the things we do not want to do. With psychological depth and soulful storytelling, Dr. Kelly Flanagan’s *The Road Less Triggered* offers a path toward a gentler way of being in the world.”

Katherine Willis Pershey, pastor, author of *Very Married* and
Love Letters to God

“In *The Road Less Triggered*, Dr. Kelly shines a light on the subtle moments that derail connection. His wisdom helps us pause, stay present, and choose love over defensiveness. This book will be a game changer for your relationships.”

Mike McCarthy, cofounder, Gobundance

The Road Less Triggered

Turning Conflict into Connection with a Single Choice

DR. KELLY FLANAGAN

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Books by Dr. Kelly Flanagan

Loveable

True Companions

The Road Less Triggered

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The Road Less Triggered

*Turning Conflict into Connection with a Single
Choice*

Dr. Kelly Flanagan



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Between stimulus and response there is a space.
In that space is our power to choose our response.
In our response lies our growth and our freedom.

Viktor Frankl

Contents

It's Your Choice 000

Part I: Get Calm 000

1. Sense Conflict Coming 000
2. Disrupt Your Defensiveness 000
3. Cultivate Calmness Before Connectedness 000

Part II: Get Free 000

4. Simplify the Solution 000
5. Trace Your Triggers Through Time 000
6. Feel Your Way to Freedom 000

Part III: Get Connected 000

7. Set Boundaries Without Battles 000
8. Turn Conflict into Curiosity 000
9. Connect with Compassion 000

It's Your Power 000

Discussion Guide 000

Acknowledgments 000

Notes 000

It's Your Choice

Choices are the hinges of destiny.

Pythagoras

There is a moment that repeats itself over and over again in your life.

It can happen anytime and anywhere, but it occurs most commonly in your relationships. It's the moment when togetherness turns into tension, connectedness devolves into defensiveness, harmony gives way to hostility, or communication collapses into conflict. It's the last thing you want in your marriage, your parenting, your family, your friendships, or your business, but in the moment, you probably feel powerless to change it.

You know the moment all too well, yet in many ways it remains a mystery.

You catch yourself replaying the scene in your mind, searching for a solution. You resolve to do something different during it. You probably even have some success here and there, but it doesn't last. Eventually, the moment always wins, as your best intentions revert to knee-jerk reactions. Perhaps you plan to speak up, but instead you clam up. Or the opposite: You plan to calm down, but instead you throw down. Perhaps you get preachy and pedantic—a little smirky, a bit judgy, a touch controlling—and it pushes away the people you want to pull close. Before you know it, you're firing off a text or an email you'll regret tomorrow, or your date night has jumped the tracks, or the car ride with your kid has become one more brick in the wall of an increasingly alienated relationship.

Afterward, you feel defeated by the seemingly inevitable repetition of it all. Stuck in the cycle. Trapped in its triggers. The prisoner of a pattern. You might go through seasons of relative tranquility, yet, despite your best efforts, two steps forward turn into three steps back. Between episodes, you may forget about it altogether. However, in the middle of an episode, you carry the stress of it in your body throughout the day, and you may lose sleep over it at night. Your preoccupation with it disrupts your presence and diminishes your productivity. You worry you're doing irreparable harm to the most valuable assets in your life: your relationships.

You may even feel hopeless about saving them.

In an interview with author Malcolm Gladwell, relationship scientist John Gottman reported that “people are in one of two states in a relationship,” and went on to describe those two states:

The first is what I call positive sentiment override . . . where positive emotion overrides irritability. It's like a buffer. Their spouse will do something bad, and they'll say, “Oh, he's just in a crummy mood.” Or they can be in negative sentiment override, so that even a relatively neutral thing that a partner says

gets perceived as negative. In the negative sentiment override state, people draw lasting conclusions about each other. If their spouse does something positive, it's a selfish person doing a positive thing. It's really hard to change those states. . . . Once they start going down, toward negative emotion, ninety-four percent will continue going down.¹

In other words, once the moment hits, 94 percent of us no longer feel free to choose connection over conflict in our most important relationships.

This book is about restoring your choice when you're triggered.

Triggered is a word our culture has taken to extremes. On the one hand, we use it in a strictly clinical way, tethering it to trauma and medical diagnoses like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In that sense, *triggered* is a word reserved for a relatively exclusive group of exceptionally wounded people. On the other hand, the word *triggered* has also been hijacked by TikTok. Someone might get served a latte with the wrong kind of cold foam at Starbucks and lament to thousands of online followers that they were "triggered" by it. In that sense, the word is rendered trite and meaningless.

In these pages, we'll take *triggered* back from the extremes. It's not something that happens only to combat veterans. Nor is it always happening to everybody all the time almost everywhere. Rather, it's something that happens regularly and repetitively in very specific moments.

And every time it happens, you have another chance to own the moment, instead of the moment owning you.

Where Communication *Really* Breaks Down

I started falling asleep with headphones on in middle school for a couple reasons. First, I'd just bought a bajillion albums from BMG—for a penny plus shipping and handling—and there weren't enough waking hours in the day to listen to them all. Also, my friend's parents were fighters.

The first time I spent the night there, all was well until we turned out the lights, and then the arguing began. I didn't say anything. Neither did he. I figured it was a fluke and forgot about it. However, the second sleepover was a replica of the first. He climbed into the top bunk, and I climbed into the bottom. He turned off the lights, and they turned on their conflict.

I thought he'd fallen asleep when, from above me, I heard a muttered, "Sorry."

"It's okay," I said, trying to ease his embarrassment.

"No, it's not," he said. "It's stupid. Every night it's the exact same fight." Bed springs creaked overhead as he rolled over. A few minutes later, some subtle snoring suggested he'd already fallen asleep.

I just lay there listening to them. My friend was right. It was basically the same argument they'd had before. A few of the details had changed, but the gist of it hadn't: If he would just say the one thing she wanted him to say, and if she would just do the one thing he wanted her to do, it would all be over. The solutions seemed so simple to me, yet every time they'd come close to one, something would go sideways, and the whole conversation

would get recycled. It never got ugly, which is to say it didn't feel dangerous, it just felt *endless*.

The third time I spent the night, I packed my Walkman, headphones, and a bunch of cassette tapes. That time, when they started arguing, my friend skipped the apology and went straight to snoring, and I eavesdropped for only a few minutes. Sure enough, the script was basically the same. I fell asleep listening to “Every Rose Has Its Thorn” by Poison and wondering why a kid could see the answers more clearly than the adults.

I suppose you could say I've been a student of relationships since a dirt bike was my best way to get around.

Later in college, when I wrote my sophomore honors thesis on marital communication, I learned my friend's parents' were pretty typical: Most relationship conflict feels less like D-Day and more like Groundhog Day—that movie where Bill Murray has to repeat the same twenty-four hours over and over again. After I finished the thesis, I joined a relationship research laboratory. Could showing couples a video of themselves in conflict—and giving them just two sessions of feedback about their behavior—increase the odds of their happiness over time? We proved it could.

I went on to get a PhD from Penn State University, where I studied thousands of hours of videotaped conflict while writing a dissertation on the core relationship needs that float beneath the surface of everyday conversations like who's going to pick up Billy from school or why watching Monday night football doesn't count as a date night. Then, suddenly, I was a full-time marriage therapist with a wife of my own. Naturally, with all that training in relationships, I fixed every marriage that came through my office, and my own marriage was nothing but bliss from the very beginning.

Well. Actually.

At the office, every couple's top request was better communication, but I quickly discovered that in the real world, traditional communication training wasn't very effective at improving couples' connection. The vast majority of my clients were actually good communicators already, functioning well in their vocations as doctors, attorneys, teachers, entrepreneurs, and stay-at-home parents of bustling households. In most of their life domains, they used the communication tools they already possessed with great skill. The problem wasn't a lack of tools.

The problem was, at the most important moment in their conversation, they'd close their toolbox.

Meanwhile, at home, I was replicating all the unproductive patterns I'd learned about in my studies. Perhaps the apostle Paul said it best: “For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do” (Rom. 7:15). Over and over again, I'd feel disconnected but refuse to show myself. I'd hope for peace but go on the attack instead. I'd try to forgive but turn it into a fight. I had a doctorate in communication—the most well-stocked toolbox of all—and yet I, too, would close it right when I needed it most.

Finally, I gave up.

No, we didn't get divorced, nor did I have an affair. Rather, I intentionally shifted my focus from relationship transformation to self-examination. I traded out communication tools for introspection tools. In scientific terms, this was akin to a "single-case study" or an "N-of-1 trial." In spiritual terms, it's called contemplation. Whatever you want to call it, for almost twenty years now, I've studied the way **communication breaks down not between people but within people**, and I've replicated my results with countless clients. My central finding is that our communication toolbox is the key to our relational success.

And it goes by another name.

Your Communication Toolbox

I was cofacilitating a marriage retreat for an entrepreneurial group when the other facilitator asked each couple to turn their chairs so they were facing each other with knees touching and eyes locked. Then she said, "One . . . two . . . three . . . *close* your hearts to each other," and listed a bunch of reasons to go into protection mode. Next, she reversed the instructions. "One . . . two . . . three . . . *open* your hearts to each other," and listed a bunch of reasons to go into connection mode. Then she alternated those commands for a few minutes before bringing the group back together and asking what it felt like to have their hearts closed versus open. Everybody agreed: They were now aware of how different the two states felt.

"Good," she said, "but that's not actually the most important takeaway from this exercise. This is what you need to remember more than anything else." Everyone leaned in.

"You have a choice," she said.

Everyone leaned back, letting that sink in.

Maybe you need to lean back and let that sink in too: **Your communication toolbox is your heart.** When it's open, you are in connection mode, and you have access to all the communication tools you need to consistently connect with others. When it's closed, you are in protection mode, and you forfeit your access to those tools. Furthermore, you *choose* to open or close it—you just don't realize it because the moment of choice passes so quickly and unconsciously. In the heat of the moment, it *feels* like when someone does A, B, or C, your heart automatically opens; and it *feels* like when they do X, Y, or Z, your heart automatically closes. Because we've never slowed down to examine that moment, we're mostly unaware of the choice we make in the nanosecond between what is happening to us and how we respond.

Let's slow down and examine it now.

When everything is going the way you want it to, the choice to be openhearted is an easy one—so easy, in fact, that it doesn't feel like a choice at all. You just open your heart to what *is*. You let it all in. You come all the way out to meet it. When your team wins the big game, it doesn't feel like you're choosing to enjoy it—it just feels like celebration. In fact, your heart is subtly opening like that all the time, and you let it.

My heart naturally opens to my first sip of coffee in the morning.
Sunrises over the Atlantic and sunsets over the Great Plains.
Good weather at my tee time and good moods at dinnertime.
A walk in the woods.
Peppermint Patties.
My wife's approval.
People doing what I believe is best for them.
God answering my prayers according to my preferences.
Did I mention my wife's approval?
Financial security.
More financial security.
Also, in case I haven't mentioned it, my wife's approval.

Our fondest memories are often formed around moments of exceptional openheartedness. When we were kids, that's what made Christmas morning so magical for so many of us—it wasn't the presents; it was that our hearts were wide open to the presents. I recall one Christmas moment in particular.

I was perhaps eight or nine years old and had fallen asleep during a ten-hour drive to spend the holiday with my beloved grandparents in the town where I'd been born. I awoke to the slowing of the car entering the city limits around midnight. The streets were empty. Christmas wreathes adorned every lamppost. Big, silent snowflakes slowly descended and zoomed toward our windshield one after the other. I was home again.

When we say something was “magical,” what we really mean is it opened our heart as wide as a heart can go.

Your first sleepover with your childhood best friend. The book that made you fall in love with reading. Your first crush. The first time you tasted the freedom of driving on your own without an adult pumping an imaginary brake in the passenger seat. The first time you made art. The day you said yes to your true companion. Your firstborn in your arms. You remember each of these moments so vividly because they were moments in which you opened your heart to receive what your soul most deeply desired.

Openheartedness is what happens when you are fully experiencing the present moment without doing anything to it. When all is going well, it can feel a lot like breathing. It just happens.

It isn't until something knocks the wind out of you that you have to be intentional about getting your breath back.

Your friends have coffee without you and post it on social media. Your parents act like your parents. Your spouse does that thing that has become more and more irritating over the years. Your baby—now a teenager—makes a terrible decision that could impact the rest of their life and then acts like you're the most ignorant thing on two feet for questioning it. Someone steals your parking spot. You do your best, and someone says it's not good enough. You disclose something near and dear to your heart, and you're met with a blank stare. You ask for love but all you get is lip service. You send a thoughtful text and never hear back. You feel lonely, ashamed, wronged, rejected, misjudged, abandoned, threatened, overwhelmed, scared, panicked,

intimidated, lost, frustrated, or enraged. The list goes on and on. However, this isn't a book about *what* knocks the wind out of us.

It's a book about what to *do* when the wind gets knocked out of us.

It's a book about the split-second decision you make when you're triggered and your heart reflexively closes to what's happening: *Will you let it close, or will you keep it open?* In other words, it's about the practice of openheartedness, which is the conscious choice to fully experience the present moment as it is, especially when it's not going the way you want it to. It's about how to handle any moment that is breaking badly so you can show up to that moment with your best stuff.

I flew home from that couples' retreat finally knowing what to call the communication toolbox and knowing I had a choice to keep it open or not. Then, for eighteen of the most painful months of my life, I completely ignored the choice.

Three Big Questions

On December 31, 2020, I was broken. Literally. The year had laid me low.

It began in January, when my best friend and I dissolved our business partnership *and* our friendship. Inside, my heart was breaking, but on the outside, I'm guessing my closed heart looked cold and calculating. Two months later, COVID-19 hit. My wife and I were faced with the unprecedented challenge of transforming our in-person therapy practices into online businesses. Meanwhile, the kids were schooling at home and quickly becoming Zoombies. My heart was closed to all of it. One afternoon, I decided to blow off steam on a bike ride—a dangerous mindset for high-speed cycling. Just moments into an incautious ride, I flew over the handlebars and shattered my left collarbone on an asphalt road.

They say that bones heal stronger in the broken places. Mine didn't. "Fibrous tissue non-union fractures," they called them. Basically, I now have two hinges in that collarbone where before there were none.

The nature of the injury meant a lengthy rehabilitation, so by the end of the year my body was out of shape, and on New Year's Eve I found myself contemplating fitness resolutions for the coming year. Keto vs. paleo. Intermittent fasting versus 5:2. Cardio versus strength training. It was just then, while searching the internet for fitness plans, that I came across this quote: "Do not let anything that happens in life be important enough that you're willing to close your heart over it."²

It was a wake-up call: My spiritual heart was in even worse shape than my physical one. It was almost always closed, and even when it was open, it would close again on a hair trigger. A change in my physical condition would need to begin with a change to my emotional condition. Right then and there, I made my New Year's resolution:

Moment to moment, I will notice my heart closing and try to open it back up.

Most New Year's resolutions are abandoned by the third week of January. Not this one. Years later, openheartedness has become my core life

practice. It is my most sacred spiritual discipline. The apostle Paul exhorted us to pray without ceasing. The practice of openheartedness is my prayer, and every day the choice gets clearer and quicker. So why did I wait so long to start making the choice?

Because I had the same three questions about it that everyone does.

Can I be openhearted and have boundaries at the same time?

After delivering a keynote to a group of hard-charging entrepreneurial women in Costa Rica, the first question from the audience was, “I want to be openhearted toward my employees, but it wouldn’t be appropriate to tell them everything about my personal life, would it?” When openheartedness is initially suggested to someone with more “doing” energy, the first question on their mind is usually, “Oh no, how much am I going to have to divulge?” They worry about how much they will have to *reveal*. They fear a lack of boundaries about what will come *out* of them.

In contrast, after introducing openheartedness to my online community, several of them feared it would turn them into doormats. “I’m just learning to have boundaries with people,” one person said, “and it sounds like I’d have to let them walk all over me again.” When openheartedness is initially suggested to someone with more “being” energy, the first question on their mind is usually, “Oh no, how much am I going to have to take?” They worry about how much they will have to *receive*. They fear a lack of boundaries about what will get *into* them.

Both reactions represent a common misconception about the relationship between the inner condition of our heart and the outer action of our boundary setting. What these reactions reveal is that we’ve gotten into the bad habit of using a closed heart to set our boundaries. The truth is, **an open heart doesn’t make your boundaries weaker, it makes your boundaries wiser**. Every time you hold your heart open intentionally while holding your boundaries consciously, you are being transformed into a healthier and holier human being. You’ve learned how to have limits and how to love at the same time.

If it feels like openhearted boundary setting is a big iceberg and we’re only addressing the tip of it here, you’re right. In chapter 7, we’ll explore the whole iceberg.

Why would I want to open my heart to hard things?

“I try to stay positive,” a client says to me. “I mean, if something tragic happens, I’ll feel it with the best of them, but otherwise I don’t really see the point of dwelling on things.” Meanwhile, on the split screen, tears streak his wife’s cheeks beneath red-rimmed eyes. She’s just had a biopsy and is waiting for the results. “Why would I open up to her negativity when we don’t know anything definitive yet?” he asks.

I tell him about the Fox River that runs through northern Illinois. The Army Corps of Engineers recently recommended the removal of several manmade dams along the river, because any benefit of the dams is far outweighed by the ecological damage caused by shallow waters downriver. Our experiences are like that river, I tell him; when we close our heart to experiences that are meant to move through us, we create more problems downriver than we solve. Then I share some ancient Eastern wisdom.

“Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional,” I say.

Therapist and bestselling author Lori Gottlieb puts it this way: “There’s a difference between pain and suffering. . . . You’re going to have to feel pain—everyone feels pain at times—but you don’t have to suffer so much. You’re not choosing the pain, but you’re choosing the suffering.”³ In other words, if you open your heart to something hard, you’ll feel the pain briefly, but then it will pass. However, if you close your heart to it, you now have the pain still waiting to be experienced, as well as the suffering created by your closing.

“The pain right now,” I say, “is your wife’s sadness, while the unnecessary suffering created by your closed heart is the disconnection between the two of you in the midst of it, and the conflict that will come from that disconnection.”

The forms of unnecessary suffering downriver from a closed heart are countless. We’ve already covered many of them. Conflict and coldness. Division and divorce. There’s also compulsively avoidant and sometimes addictive behaviors. For example, when you want to close your heart to what’s happening in your life, scrolling, browsing, working, drinking, and using drugs all make effective dams, for a while. They can also make for tremendous suffering downriver. Furthermore, when you block pain, you also have to block pleasure. **Joy and sorrow are not separate rivers—when you open your heart, they flow as one.** If we dam up sorrow, we dam up joy. Then we wonder why it feels so stagnant and lifeless downriver.

As you close your heart to difficult things, your life gets smaller and smaller, one choice at a time.

Okay, but how do you open your heart?

In the early days of 2021, following the resolution to open my heart whenever it closed, that was the question I most needed to answer. I traced the quote which had inspired my resolution to a book, but it was light on instruction. To open your heart, the author suggested, you simply “relax and release.”⁴ Easier said than done.

Over the next several years, I drew upon my decades of psychological training in communication and relationships, a range of scientific disciplines beyond my own, the core tenets of the world’s faith and wisdom traditions, and plenty of trial-and-error learning to hone the process by which anyone can restore their freedom to stay openhearted and to cultivate calm

connection, even in their most triggered moments. I call it the Peaceful Pivot Process.

In these pages, it will take you only a few hours of reading to learn what it took me years to discover.

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Peaceful Pivot Process

The structure of this book mirrors the process I've developed for teaching people how to live openheartedly. It happens in three parts, with three steps in each part.

Part I: Get Calm. In chapter 1, you'll learn to see conflict coming significantly sooner by tapping into your underutilized sixth sense and turning your bodily sensations into early warning signs of the coming closure. This is an essential foundation of openheartedness, because the earlier you can observe your heart close, the more easily you can keep your heart open. In chapter 2, you'll learn why you can't defeat your defensiveness, but how you can delay it long enough to disrupt it. In doing so, you'll begin to wedge that nanosecond of choice apart just a little more. In chapter 3, we'll utilize that extra space to cultivate calmness before connectedness. As you make tending to your triggered nervous system your top priority, you'll experience a rapid decrease in the dysfunction caused by dysregulation.

At that point, you may be tempted to stop there, because it will kinda-sorta feel like it's working.

There'll be fewer fights and a little more connection, and you'll feel a bit more relaxed. However, you'll periodically find yourself triggered and right back at square one, revealing how much you're still just white-knuckling this openheartedness thing. White-knuckling isn't very much fun. It's not freedom. It's a daily pop quiz, and you pass it more than you used to, but you're still getting a B- in the class. I'd encourage you to skip this interlude and go right into part two.

Part II: Get Free. In chapter 4, we'll explore the possibility that it's not the people *around* us who are triggering our heart to close but an experience *within* us. Here, we'll simplify the solution to all of your triggered moments by identifying the singular source of them within you. In chapter 5, you'll turn your triggered moments into a time machine, tracing them throughout your story, helping you to understand how the past is unconsciously driving your reactions in the present. In chapter 6, you'll feel your way to freedom by allowing the pain of your past to flow rather than fester.

This part concludes with a deep sense of inner safety. As you begin to feel genuinely comfortable in your own skin—even during your most triggered moments—you'll be tasting some true freedom for the first time, and you may be tempted to enter a second kind of interlude, in which you bypass potential conflict completely. You'll feel your heart closing and have the power to simply walk away with an open heart. However, this will

eventually reveal itself to be just as unsatisfying as the closing. **We're not here to walk away, we're here to walk together.**

I'd encourage you to skip this interlude as well and jump right into part three.

Part III: Get Connected. In chapter 7, we'll take everything you've learned previously and put it to work for you and your relationships by showing you how to set sincere boundaries without battles. Specifically, we'll explore a third way beyond the boundarylessness of codependence and the harsh boundaries of independence. You'll learn a method for setting healthy, openhearted, *interdependent* boundaries.

The establishment of true interdependence often represents a sort of golden age of openheartedness for many people, but, like any golden age, it can't last forever. There will be "failures" of openheartedness. By the time you're through with chapter 8, though, you'll realize there is no such thing as a failure. By harnessing your newfound power to remain curious, each new closing will be transformed into an opportunity for even deeper connection with yourself and your people.

Finally, in chapter 9, you'll begin to experience the mastery that comes when someone closes their heart to you and you instantly perceive the pain beneath their protection. This kind of compassion is the pinnacle of openhearted connection, and it can be practiced in the bedroom and the boardroom and every space in between, transforming each of those spaces into a place of peaceful connection.

It's a way of being truly together without interlude.

The Freedom to Turn Both Ways

When I was a boy—in those years before headphones helped me fall asleep—I lived in a trailer park, my clothes came from rummage sales, and the kitchen cupboards were stocked with Kraft Macaroni & Cheese.

Also, my mode of transportation was a car that couldn't turn left.

It was a gold, decades-old Buick Skylark. End-to-end, it couldn't have been much shorter than the mobile home. Its vast bench seats were upholstered in leather that smelled like dust and burned the bottoms of your legs in the summer heat. If it had seatbelts, I didn't use them. And for some reason, which I never thought to question as a kid, the glittering behemoth could only make right turns. If you arrived at a four-way intersection and needed to turn left, you drove straight for a block, made three right turns to circle back to the same intersection, which you'd go straight through, and—voilà—you were back on course.

When we're triggered, we're like that old Buick Skylark—we can only turn in one direction, and usually that direction is conflict. Then, it takes many turns to get our connection back on course. Those many turns take time and fuel, and they are a wildly inefficient way to be driving through our relationships. This book is going to put you in a brand-new automobile that can turn either way at the most important intersections in your life. You'll be

Dr. Kelly Flanagan, *The Road Less Triggered*
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

free to choose calm connection where before you could only turn toward conflict.

You'll be empowered, finally, to take the road less triggered.

WAIT! BEFORE YOU GO...

This is Dr. Kelly, and I want to personally thank you for pre-ordering *The Road Less Triggered*. I hope the Introduction has already given you a new lens through which to look at key moments in your life. I know the rest of the book will transform the way you show up to those moments. I can't wait for you to receive it on March 3rd!

In the meantime, you have a chance to get hundreds—maybe even thousands—of dollars of additional bonuses, by pre-ordering more copies for your friends, family, team, community, or organization.

For instance, you can order enough copies to gift to your closest people, or even to start a book club with them. That's the Silver package:

SILVER—Order 5 Copies and you'll receive:

- 5 copies of *The Road Less Triggered* to share with your people
- 1 year of Premier membership to my online community The Less Triggered Tribe
- Access to my online course, The Less Triggered Teachings, in Spring 2026
- Access to exclusive quarterly trainings with me, beginning Summer 2026

Total Value: ~~\$620~~
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But that's not all.

We've designed a once-in-a-lifetime event to support the transformation made possible by this book. The Relational Intelligence Summit will take place on June 12, 2026, at the exquisite 4U Ranch just outside of Park City, Utah.

I'll be coming out of retreat-hosting retirement for one day to personally walk you and a plus-one through the principles in this book, and I'll be joined by world-class relationship experts and experiential facilitators.

The only way to get tickets to the event is to support the book and its message by purchasing one of the bulk packages on the next page...

GOLD—Order 50 Copies and you'll receive:

- 50 copies of *The Road Less Triggered* to share with your people
- A virtual interactive ticket to The Relational Intelligence Summit so you can experience it from the comfort of your own home
- Lifetime access to the event replay
- Everything in the Silver package

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- 100 copies of *The Road Less Triggered* to share with your people
- A ticket for two to attend the Relational Intelligence Summit in-person
- Access to all three sessions: Get Calm, Get Free, and Get Connected
- Lunch along the river and a closing cocktail reception
- Everything in the Gold package

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PLATINUM—Order 200 Copies and you'll receive:

- 200 copies of *The Road Less Triggered* to share with your people
- A ticket for two to the VIP event the evening before the Summit
- An evening of entertainment, finely-catered dining, and meaningful connection, priming you for the Summit to follow
- Everything in the Diamond package

~~Total Value: \$22,900~~

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To find out more, go to: lesstriggered.com/upgrade