

The Road Less Traveled Summary

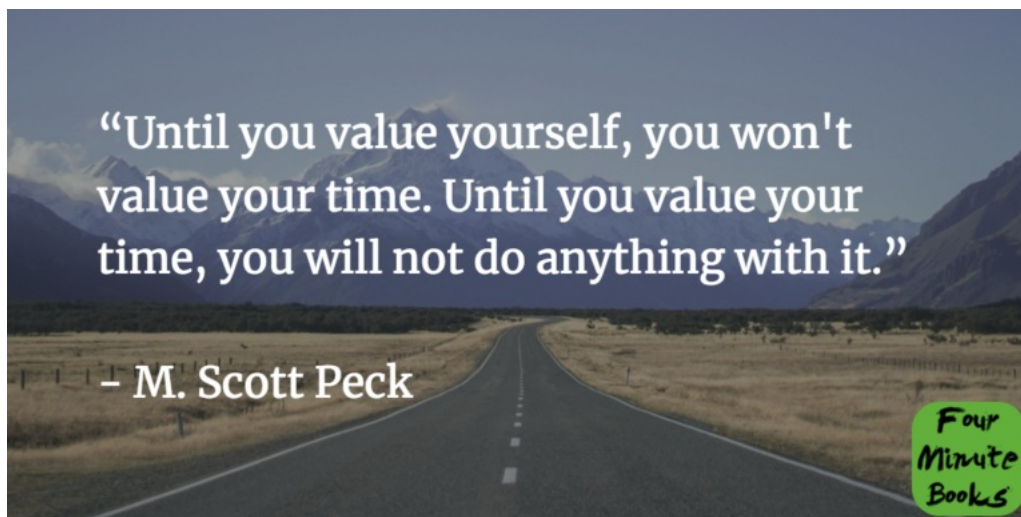


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1-Sentence-Summary: *The Road Less Traveled* is a spiritual classic, combining scientific and religious views to help you grow by confronting and solving your problems through discipline, love and grace.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



One thing that's become abundantly clear to me after I finished Ryan Holiday's latest book, *Perennial Seller*, is that creating a piece of work that stands the test of time is no easy task. Especially when you think beyond the trend wave any new release rides, maybe even beyond your own life. The Lindy effect is a good test: If a non-perishable thing like a technology, movie, or book has been around for 20 years, we can expect it to last another 20.

If this theory holds up, then *The Road Less Traveled* will sell well until at least 2058. Published in 1978 by then little-known American psychiatrist M. Scott Peck, this evergreen's 40th birthday is fast approaching. Until now, it's sold a staggering ten million copies.

Using his experience from counseling many clients throughout his career, he lays out a recipe for a fulfilled life that's based on self-discipline, love, spirituality, and a mysterious force he calls grace. Mastering these is essential to maintain personal growth, he suggests, which in turn is key to a happy existence.

Here are 3 lessons from the first three categories he discusses:

1. Stay open to change your perspective of reality at any moment.
2. The action of loving is much more important than the feeling, which is fleeting.

3. We're all religious, because religion is nothing more than a distinct perception of the world.

At Four Minute Books, we're all about finding new paths. What better way to do that than to take *The Road Less Traveled*? Let's go!

Lesson 1: Always be willing to update your view of the world.

Most of our decisions to be dishonest originate from irrational thinking. When we lie, consciously or not, we've often just fallen prey to so-called cognitive biases, like the backfire effect, survivorship bias or irrational escalation. It's easy to raise a finger and say: "Always be honest!" A lot of gurus do that.

That's why I like the words Peck uses: A *dedication* to truth. He doesn't emphasize being honest so much, as that's often out of our control. What matters, he suggests is that we **remain open to being wrong**. How willing are you to change your opinion at a moment's notice? It's hard. It takes a lot of humility.

Sometimes, even when we're presented with an opportunity to get a better understanding of reality, like facts that prove we're wrong, we still can't change our mind. Worse, we might even reaffirm our rusty and false beliefs (this is the backfire effect in action). You don't have to cheer when you learn you're on the wrong track, but if you can pause and entertain the idea of a new opinion at any time, you're already closer to the truth than most people.

Lesson 2: Love is an action, not a feeling.

One of Sigmund Freud's many contributions to the field of psychology was the idea of cathexis. It's defined as the investment of emotional energy into an object or a person, often to an extent that's unhealthy. Think of it like a romantic obsession or overdose of sexual desire.

Peck says cathexis happens when we intently focus on the "falling in love" aspect of a relationship that often happens early on. As a consequence, our love might burn with a bright flame, but soon fizzle into sparks before extinguishing altogether. To prevent this, he suggests we think of love as an action, not a feeling. If our love is genuine, it won't require lots of feelings at all, since it's much bigger than cathexis.

For example, in a well-functioning marriage both partners continue to choose their spouse, because they made a commitment to support that person and strive towards their goals together. Even if they disagree and occasionally get angry at each other, they don't get swayed by those passing feelings.

In this sense, showing your love is as simple as giving your attention, listening and helping your partner reach their goals. No crazy feelings needed. This is similar to the distinction Jonathan Haidt made in *The Happiness Hypothesis* between passionate and

companionate love. Without the latter, no relationship can last long-term.

Lesson 3: Religion is just a way of viewing the world, which means we all have one.

We mostly view religion as a set of strict rules and traditional rituals that a certain group follows in order to worship a or multiple deities. Peck begs to differ. He says we need to expand our definition of religion and uses it synonymously with 'worldview.' **Our perspective of life is mostly shaped by our education in school and at home, as well as the family environment we grow up in.**

For example, one of Peck's clients was brought up by extremely conservative, devout and physically abusive parents. As a result he thought the world was an evil place, trying to punish him for every mistake he made. His religion was "everyone is out to get me, so I must play by the rules." Notice how there's no God involved in this.

What can we do to improve our religion, then? This goes back to the first lesson: Be open to change. Peck says taking a scientist's approach allows us to continue exploring and questioning the world around us, so we can constantly improve our opinions and view of the world.

The Road Less Traveled Review

The Road Less Traveled strikes a great balance between science and religion, declaring neither superior to the other, which is likely a big part of its allure. Besides discipline, love and spirituality, Peck also describes grace as a mysterious force of positive growth in our lives. It universally adds serendipity in ways we can't quite explain and thus comes as close to a miracle as it gets. A good read for everyone who leans heavily towards either side of the science-religion spectrum.

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What else can you learn from the blinks?

- Why delayed gratification is so important
- How the author learned to accept responsibility
- What happens when you lose balance
- The difference between the desire to love and the will to
- Where you can find grace
- What humanity's original sin is

Who would I recommend The Road Less Traveled summary to?

The 17 year old, who returns home each day to a hostile household, the 29 year old single, who can't explain why none of her relationships last and anyone who's very religious or agnostic.