

## NOTES FROM: *The Pathless Path*, by Paul Millerd

**SUMMARY:** The chances of a perfect life path being successfully scripted *for* you by someone else are precisely *zero*. We exist in a community of others, but *individually*, we are completely alone, and our lives are completely up to us.

More than that, we have the opportunity - the *ability* - to curate our own reality every moment, and by definition, *no one else can do this for us*. We think that the meaning of life is "out there" and that we have to *find out* what it is. When in reality, it is Life that asks *us* the questions, and how we live is our answer.

In the same way, Paul Millerd doesn't have any answers. There are no hacks or step-by-step formulas in this book, no mandatory reading lists, and no milestones you have to hit in order to live a meaningful life.

Instead, *The Pathless Path* is about the invisible scripts that shepherd us into prescribed modes of living and being in the world; it's about freedom and creativity; it's about money, meaning, and work; and it's about being fearlessly, unapologetically *yourself*, in a world that shouts back, "*You can't do that!*"

It's also about going somewhere, but not following anything. Getting lost, and finding yourself. Leaving, but never arriving.

The *default path* - doing what everyone else is doing, living the same day, week, month, and year that everyone else is living over and over again - used to work for most people. But this future that we're building together is not a "default" future. We have *so* many more options and opportunities - possibilities for our lives that we can explore and take to their logical conclusions. *The default path is dying away*, and we have to come to terms with our own freedom and what we want to do with it.

I mean, here you are, *the universe's most spectacular creation*, and you're just "kinda sorta getting by." Living a "good enough" life, surviving day to day, coasting through a default world you never made.

*The Pathless Path* is Paul Millerd's answer to the question of what makes meaningful work and what we might aspire to in our lives. But you and I can never be Paul Millerd. *His life is taken*. You can only be *yourself*, and I can only be *myself*. The pathless path is *narrow*, wide enough for only one person. *You*.

---

Ram Dass: “This is the pathless path. Where the journey leads is to the deepest truth in you.”

“My restlessness was easy to hide because my path was filled with impressive names and achievements, and when you're on such a path, no one asks, ‘Why are you doing this?’”

“The pathless path is an alternative to the default path. It is an embrace of uncertainty and discomfort. It's a call to adventure in a world that tells us to conform. For me, it's also a gentle reminder to laugh when things feel out of control and trust that an uncertain future is not a problem to be solved.”

“I was able to shift away from a life built on getting ahead and towards one focused on coming alive.”

“The hardest questions often don't have answers.”

“‘Are those the only two options?’ I asked. ‘Yes,’ he replied. I listed a few other paths that he conceded were possible, but he added, ‘I don't know anyone who has done that.’ Many people fall into this trap. We are convinced that the only way forward is the path we've been on or what we've seen people like us do. This is a silent conspiracy that constrains the possibilities of our lives.”

“I was too afraid to have a deeper conversation with myself. The kind that might pull me towards a different kind of life.”

“The best option available for my parents was the default path. This worked remarkably well for them, which is what made leaving it so damn hard. I know how much they sacrificed so that I would have better career opportunities. However, what they really gave me was so much more than the ability to succeed in school and work. It was space to dream, take risks, and be able to explore more possibilities for my life.”

“I want to see people live the lives they are capable of, not just the ones they think they are allowed to live.”

David Whyte: “The ease of having an ambition is that it can be explained to others; the very disease of ambition is that it can be so easily explained to others.”

Alan Watts: “The desire for security and the feeling of insecurity are the same thing.”

“The modern world offers an abundance of paths. In one sense this is great. It's the result of an industrial system and resulting prosperity that has created opportunities for people around the world. However, the proliferation of paths presents a challenge. With so many options it can be tempting to pick a path that offers certainty rather than doing the harder work of figuring out what we really want.”

“The house became not only a second home, but a gathering space for friends, family, and acquaintances. The door was open to everyone as long as they agreed to eat my grandfather's food. He never talked about his childhood, but according to his siblings, after their mother died, he was sent to live on a farm with his uncle. Sometime around fourth grade, he stopped going to school so that he could start working with his uncle. He didn't have a childhood filled with love and support. He chose to deal with it by trying to do better for his children and grandchildren and he succeeded. Like many of my cousins, we feel like we won the lottery growing up with a family like ours, where thanks to my grandfather we had access to a magical world filled with love, laughter, and possibility. Sitting in the house in Arizona, I knew I was about to lose him, one of the most important people in my life. Those few days were filled with tears and overwhelming emotion, but also with beauty and a profound sense of meaning. The proof of his life's work was in front of us. He had succeeded in creating a world better than the one he had grown up in. It was clear to me in those moments that family, love, and relationships were the most important things in the world. Despite this clarity, I struggled to remain present in the days before he passed. I couldn't stop thinking about work. What if my colleagues needed me? To settle my anxiety, I drove to a local cafe and checked my email. Everything was fine. A colleague messaged me, 'What are you doing!?! Go back with your family, we got you!' I smiled and closed my laptop. Driving back from the cafe, I was angry at myself. Why had I been so worried about work, something that was clearly not important? As I walked back into my grandfather's house, the house was silent. He was taking his final breaths. Had I nearly missed this moment because of some silly emails? I joined hands with my family, said a prayer, and left my worries aside for the next few days.”

“So much of my identity had been connected with being a high achiever. Straight A's. Dean's List. McKinsey. MIT. When I was sick, I would have traded every last credential for a single day of feeling okay.”

“If work dominated your every moment, would life be worth living?”

“Many self-employed people are surprised to find that once they no longer have to work for anyone else, they still have a manager in their head.”

“The Ancient Greek translation for 'work' was literally 'not-at-leisure.' In Aristotle's own words, 'we are not-at-leisure' in order to be-at-leisure.' Now, this is flipped. We work to earn time off and see leisure as a break from work. Pieper pointed out that people 'mistake leisure for idleness, and work for creativity.' To Pieper, leisure was above work. It was 'a condition of the soul,' and the 'disposition of receptive understanding, of contemplative beholding, and immersion - in the real.'”

“In stepping away from my temporary identity as a freelance consultant, I let myself fully lean into what I would later call the pathless path. As I wandered Asia, my mind exploded with possibility. If it was possible to work from a laptop in Bali, what else had I not yet considered? My imagination was open, and I was ready to see where it might take me.”

“Given sufficient coping strategies, people will be willing to tolerate consistent levels of misery for long stretches of time. Is there anything that can override this? In my conversations with people who have made changes in their life, one thing seems to work reliably: wonder. Wonder is the state of being open to the world, its beauty, and potential possibilities. With wonder, the need to cope becomes less important and the discomfort on the current path becomes more noticeable.”

Joseph Campbell: “We must let go of the life we have planned, so as to accept the one that is waiting for us.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson: “The incommunicable trees begin to persuade us to live with them, and quit our life of solemn trifles.”

Rolf Potts: “The more we associate experience with cash value, the more we think that money is what we need to live. And the more we associate money with life, the more we convince ourselves that we're too poor to buy our freedom.”

Tim Ferriss: “Why not take the usual 20-30-year retirement and redistribute it throughout life instead of saving it all for the end?”

“As I've lived in different places around the world and focused on different kinds of work, I've created mini-experiments that help me learn more about how I want to live my life. I try to think about time in blocks of one to three months and within each block, I pick one or two things I want to prioritize and test. It might be living in a different type of place, working on new projects, traveling, or learning something new. My goal is to test my beliefs to get a better understanding of what really makes my life better. Many people say things to me like 'I could never live like you do!' All I can think, however, is 'Have you tested that?'”

“For me, testing out different ways of structuring my life now is a win-win proposition. I'm lowering the odds that I'll be unhappy in the future all while crafting a life I'm more and more excited to keep living.”

“No amount of money can buy the peace of mind that comes with finding a path that you want to stay on.”

Sharon Salzberg: “Whatever takes us to our edge, to our outer limits, leads us to the heart of life's mystery, and there we find faith.”

“The fact that our next steps are unknown to us is exactly the point.”

Paul Graham: “This is not just a lesson for individuals to unlearn, but one for society to unlearn, and we'll be amazed at the energy that's liberated when we do.”

The Gospel of Thomas: “If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you.”

Charles Eisenstein: “Whereas money today embodies the principle, 'More for me is less for you,' in a gift economy, more for you is also more for me because those who have, give to those who need it. Gifts cement the mystical realization of participation in something greater than oneself which, yet, is not separate from oneself. The axioms of rational self-interest change because the self has expanded to include something of the other.”

Charles Eisenstein: “It's the generous person who is the wealthiest.”

“There are many ways to make money, and when an obvious path emerges, there is often a more interesting path not showing itself.”

“After reading this book, you should no longer be able to look at your current path and think, 'This is definitely the only way.' Instead, I hope you are able to shift to a place where you know that you have more freedom than you think, and your path can become something you choose again every day.”