

Find **Joy** in the **Middle**

**Discover and appreciate
all of life's middles**



James Hempsall

**Find Joy in the
Middle**

James Hemsall

BIS Publishers

BIS PUBLISHERS

BIS Publishers

Timorplein 46

1094 CC Amsterdam

The Netherlands

bis@bispublishers.com

www.bispublishers.com

ISBN 978 90 636 9846 1

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Design by Rich Cowan / Outrunner

rich@outrunner.co.uk

+44 (0) 7765957217

You will discover yourself in the middle at least once. Whether it be in middle age, by being a middle child, finding yourself in middle management, being middle class, or occupying a middle ground or place.

The trouble is people have negative thoughts about things in the middle, and some even ridicule it. We are very often told it is not something to aim for, nor a good place to be in.

There is a risk of languishing in the middle, which means being stuck in a state of apathy or stagnation.

This can be a place where you're experiencing significant happiness or sadness, and feeling all the effects of boredom or lack of meaning.



So...

Look again at the middle. When you find yourself there (because you will), or you feel confused, underwhelmed or disappointed by it (because you might), this book will help you to understand, embrace and celebrate it (because you really should make the most of all middles).

We have a problem to solve.

The middle affects us all, yet it is mostly described in derogatory and unhelpful terms. At best, the middle is overlooked, at worst we are fed misinformation, and loaded with lots of unhelpful stuff.

On the bookshelves there are silly books and mocking magazine articles and greeting cards poking fun at the middle aged. In comedy clubs, stand-ups use middle themes as rich laughter-fodder. That results in too many of us believing the middle is bad, unattractive, disappointing, a figure of fun, ridiculous, or embarrassing. This is strange as middles pervade all facets of life and work.

I say, don't accept this. It is plainly and simply unfair that things are this way. It is a shame the middle hasn't been better described or valued before. The middle is not mediocre, it is something to love,

aim for, be at peace with, and ultimately be happier in. We have the opportunity to do something about this.

This is a book for everyone.

Find Joy in the Middle is a book for those who become middle children, and their siblings, parents, friends, or work colleagues. It is for anyone interested in society's constructs (class in other words), especially the middle classes. It is for anyone who will be middle aged in the future, is middle aged now, and those who can look back and reflect upon their middle age. It is for people who work in middle management, underneath or above it, and those who lead or manage it. It is for anyone thinking about occupying the middle ground in opinions or views. And it is for

anyone helping other people to come to terms with their own middle. That means this is a book for everyone.

I don't think we are talking about all things middle anywhere near usefully or positively enough. I want you to deliberately, consciously, and positively place the middle firmly in your sights, targets, aims, or goals.

The middle is something to be interested in.

You may have bought this book because you are curious or identify as one or more of the middles. It may have been a gift from a friend who thinks you may be interested. You might be thinking about going straight to the chapter you most relate to first. Indeed, I invite you to do just that. Let me tell you though, there's plenty of intersectionality to be considered here, things like how middle children behave at work, especially in middle management,

how the middle aged are situated at work (or not), and how all the middles affect how we occupy the middle ground or place in social groupings and behaviours.

The middle really is a special place that has so much more to offer than merely being between other things. Find Joy in the Middle is part self-help, part popular science or psychology, part opinion-piece, part parenting manual, part philosophy, and part business guide. All those parts invite you to unlearn everything you've been told so far, because I believe there is much more joy and happiness to be discovered than we are led to believe.

The middle is a fact of life your parents, your friends and family, or even your boss ought to have told you about. If they haven't, then you will want to read this book. Maybe they could read it too.

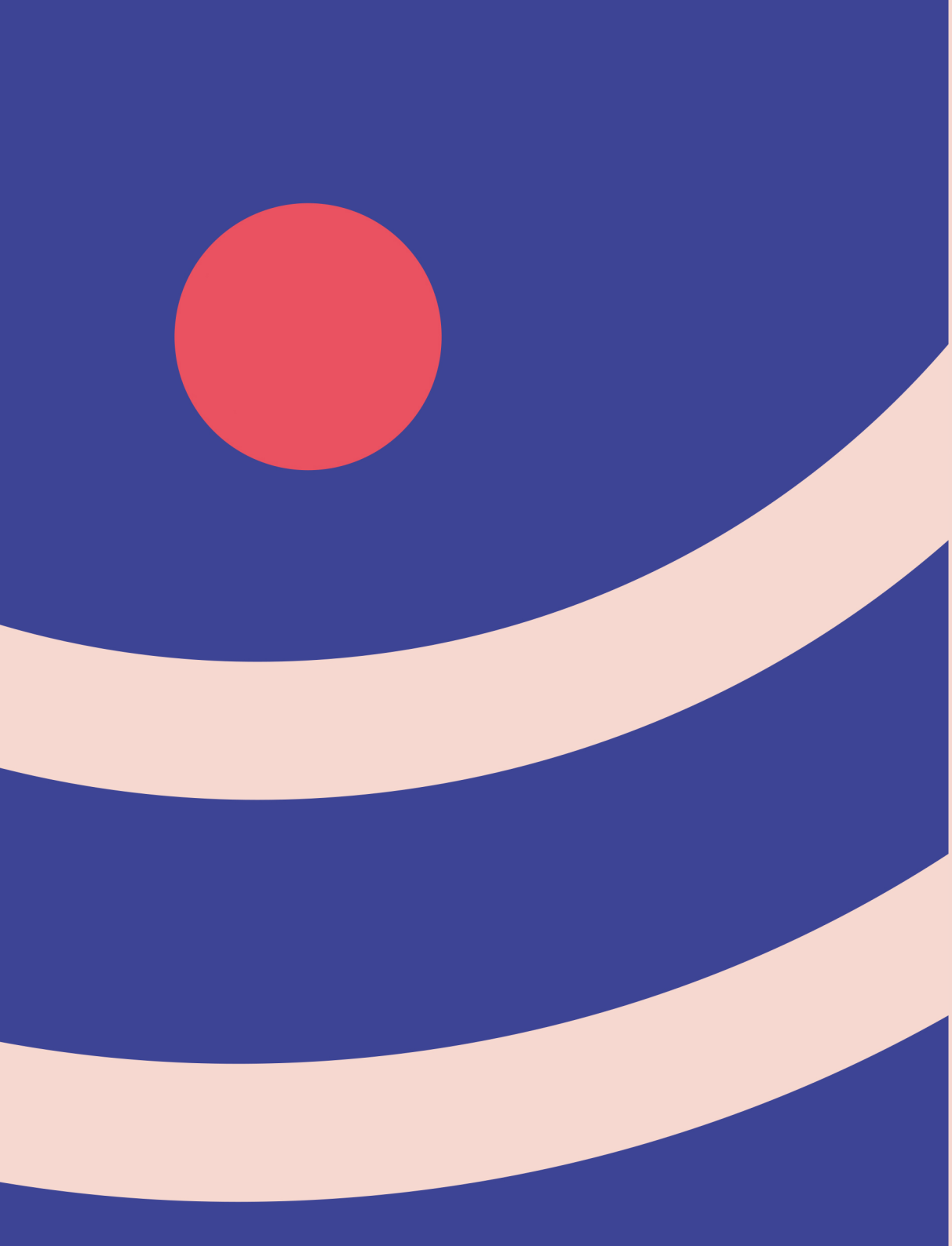


***Thank
you.***








Thank you to the friends and colleagues who have shared experiences and observations, and listened to me when I was developing these ideas and who have contributed and shaped them or allowed me to observe discreetly – whether you knew you were doing that or not.

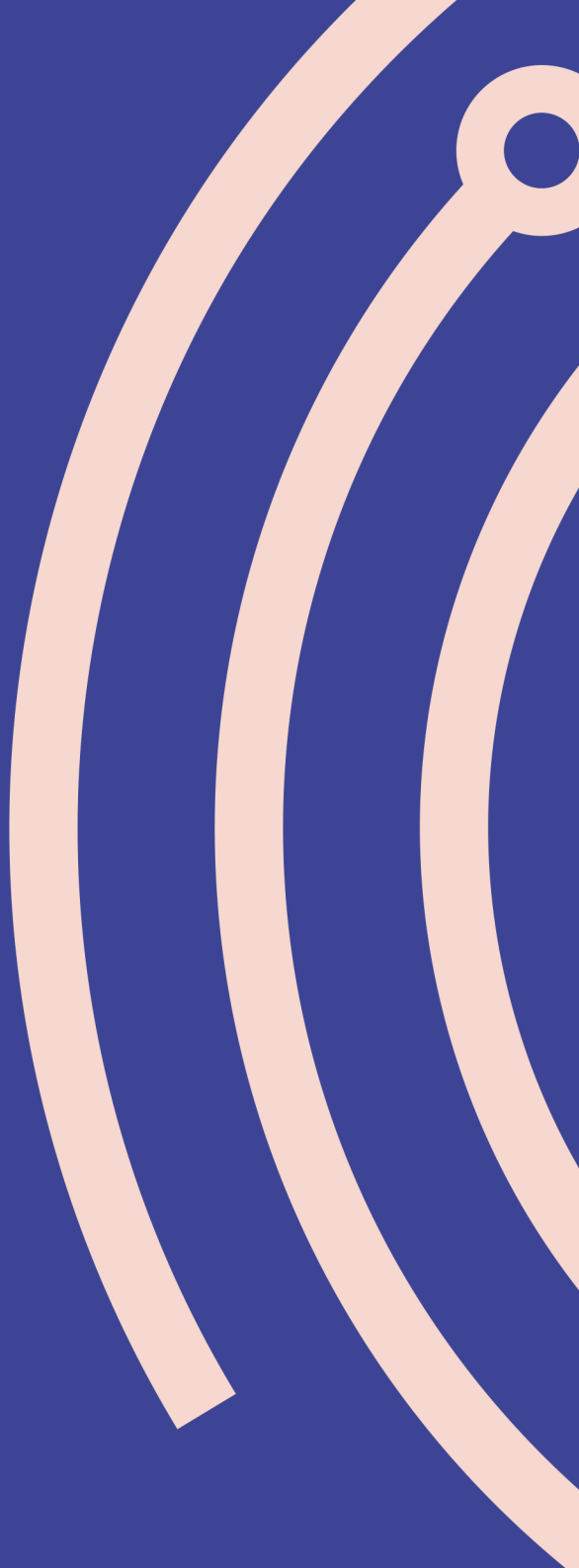
I appreciate the time some of you spent reading chapters, or let me read them to you, and for sharing your reactions, comments, edits, and reviews. And thank you to those of you who I interviewed so I could better understand your lived experiences in the middle. You've all made this book much better than it would've been if I had written it alone. For all of that I am truly lucky and very grateful.

Let's hope the result is that more people will
Find Joy in the Middle.



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The background is a solid dark blue. It features several concentric, light pink circular lines. Some of these lines are interrupted by small, solid pink circles, creating a pattern reminiscent of a stylized atom or a celestial map. The text is centered within the innermost circle.

***All
about the
middle***





Having occupied myself thinking about the middle over the last few years, I have found it to be typically defined by what it is not, the space, place, or thing between others. It is not the richest or the poorest, not the beginning or the end, not north or south or east or west, not the best or the worst, not the left or the right, not black or white, and it cannot ever be the youngest or the oldest. The middle isn't a place or a destination, neither is it boastful or showy, edgy or risky, different or extreme. It doesn't naturally brag or shout about itself, instead it is gloriously modest and reserved.

We all seem to know what it isn't. What's missing is any real consensus of what it *is*. Something compounded by the struggles we may have with terms like, in-between, comfortable, modest, stuck in the middle, the middle of nowhere, okay, reasonable, or grey. None of these terms are linked to thrilling concepts, are they?

The word middle is a common and regular feature of our modern language. Phrases and terms like 'middle of the road', 'stuck in the middle', 'middle England', 'middle America', 'middle ages', and 'middleman', amongst very many others, are all extremely familiar to us. We often use them carelessly and unthinkingly. What at first glance appears to be an innocuous term is a much more complex concept than we might have first imagined.

It seems that middles don't always enjoy the glamour, the success, or the attention that the top or the best basks in. Instead, the middle is somewhere between success and failure. This position may come from a lack ambition, or not achieving what people consider to be the very best or choosing the peace of an inconspicuous or easier life. That means people can be hesitant about what to say; 'congratulations' seems too much, 'never mind' appears a little rude. This can cause us to not talk about it often, to overlook it, or misunderstand or undervalue the middle.

That can cause us to travel through it without noticing or conscious thought, and if we do wake up and find ourselves in the middle we can feel a sense of confusion or disappointment.

People can feel uneasy and be preoccupied about how they fit into family or work hierarchies. They can be anxious about their middle age. They can be embarrassed, in denial, or graspingly aspirational about their middle classness. The middle at work can be an absolute nightmare if you are in it (and I have been), if you are either side of it (again been there and done that), or if you rely upon it either as a boss or a worker (got the T shirt). We may feel apologetic or embarrassed about holding middle ground views, especially in these synthetically polarised times, when we are supposed to be of one mind or the other. There is also the risk we seek out those echo chambers where we find people like us, people who agree with us, and don't have the benefit of being with others who hold diverse views and opinions.

To cope, we either ignore it, sneer at it, judge it, deny it, or we use humour to defend or distract from our confusion and embarrassment. I think we could be much more prepared to celebrate and enjoy the middle, without embarrassment or apology, but with joy instead. There are positives, the middle offers the place for sanctuary, peace, or harmony.

I don't want us to be discombobulated or disillusioned. Instead, I want us to be much happier in the middle. To do that, we need to better appreciate it and to understand its unique qualities and features more fully.

Society has conspired against it.

I think the middle has been subjected to orchestrated and sustained attacks for centuries. It has been shaped by societal trends and manipulated by those in positions of power. The history books, writers, moviemakers, media moguls, marketers, advertisers, social media platforms, and other aspects of life (modern and in the past) have all combined to create a grand illusion. They all want us to feel bad, disappointed, or unfulfilled about the middle, to judge it, reject it, or

to swerve or avoid it. Why might they do that? Is it to make these plotters feel better about themselves, or to feel more successful at the expense of others by layering on these feelings of latent dissatisfaction? Presumably this all gives them something, somewhere, or somebody to look down upon, to control, to sell to, and to further influence for their own advantage. I venture these behaviours are motivated and informed by a sense of lacking in themselves or palpable fear of anything different to their own lived experience or their version of convenient truth. I am pretty sure of that. The middle needs a rebrand, and that is what I am setting out to do.

History is imperfect.

To gain some insight into why all this may have happened, I want us to go back in time. Because much of what we think about the middle has its roots in history. We can learn from the distant and recent past as it helps us to understand the journey made so far, and to ponder the one yet to come. This, you shall come to realise, is a common feature of getting to grips with middles; as we look up and down, left and right, back and forth.

French statesman, Napoleon Bonaparte said history “*is the version of past events that people have decided to agree upon*”. It is edited to suit the convenience of the storyteller, cultural construct, legislature, powerbase, religion, and society. We have all fallen victim for too long to the construct of small groups of men, with narrow criteria, deciding what is worthy or historical. I think it was the English statesman, Sir Winston Churchill who said “*History is written by the winners*”, others have repeated such sage advice, and I absolutely agree! These winners are those who survived battles and wars, won political or religious positions, held resources or social status, or did well in education, in exams, or on school sports day. It explains why so much of our currency, postage stamps, art works, building names, schools, and the like is decorated by or named after white, able bodied, males. It also explains why

***“History is
written by the
winners.”***



**Sir Winston
Churchill**



Ever feel stuck in the in-between? Whether it's mid-career, middle age, middle management, or simply feeling like you don't fully belong anywhere, the middle is often seen as a place of uncertainty or frustration. But what if it's actually a source of strength and opportunity?

Find Joy in the Middle redefines what it means to be in the middle - offering fresh perspectives, real-life stories, and actionable advice to help you embrace this space with confidence. Instead of seeing it as a stage to endure, this book helps you recognise the hidden potential of life's 'middle moments' and turn them into your greatest advantage.

If you've ever felt overlooked, stuck, or searching for direction, this book will guide you toward fulfilment, resilience, and a renewed sense of purpose. The middle isn't a waiting room - it's a launch pad.

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