



START

THE MIDDLE

FINISH



HOW TO KEEP GOING IN PURSUIT OF YOUR GOALS

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TMP
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THE MIDDLE: INTRODUCTION

Despite another heavy headwind we cruised the 65 kilometres between Caiguna and Cocklebidy, two towns in the Australian Outback. Nothing beats those moments when you seem to be cutting through the odds. Unstoppable. Behind us were Day 32 (191 kilometres) and Day 36 (186 kilometres), the two longest rides we would do on the cycle tour.

Those rides flanked a three-day mission to repair and then replace a broken tyre rim (more about that in Chapter 4). We had conquered that challenge, had recovered some of the lost mileage and had pushed on with the cause-driven adventure we were both settling into. There was an intense, mounting excitement about the days of adventure still ahead of us. The tour was turning out to be a mix of challenge and triumph, which I now know is what life is all about.

Steve and I sat under the Australian sky, a ritual we followed every single evening on the two months that it took us to cross that vast land mass. The stars of the Southern Cross hung low, bright and bold, confirming that our direction was true. I looked across at our trusty Giant ATX860 mountain bikes, which were taking a well-deserved break after we had unburdened them.

We stored our panniers in our tiny ‘two man’ (manufacturers’ specifications are relative) tent. I was struck by just how little we needed to live when I considered the size of those bags that sat neatly over our back wheels when we travelled. They contained the bare necessities for an adventure such as ours: our tent, which Steve carried; a foldable pot/cooker set (which I carried); a fuel canister for our cooking system; sleeping bags; a water purifier; spare parts for our bikes (tubes, spokes, some basic tools); a rain jacket, a fleece, waterproof long pants, a couple

of shirts and pair of board shorts and an extra pair of cycling pants; extra water bottles, shoes, flip-flops; a digital camera (one megapixel, the size of a small laptop!), our film camera and some reading/writing material.

In our backpacks we carried a portable CD player (mine was anti-shock and had enough battery life for one CD a day), hats and sunscreen. A small South African flag, about the size of an A4 piece of paper, stuck out of one of the compartments. Attached to the back of our panniers were our thin blue roll-up mattresses and three-legged stools.

Our blue mattresses – almost pointless on the stony earth – were now rolled out with our sleeping bags thrown on top, ready to receive two travellers who would hopefully sleep well after another day of pedalling. Our water was coming to the boil in our small pot. Tonight would be another fabulous combination of pasta and beans or perhaps sweetcorn. Our clothes, now in serious need of a proper wash, were strung up after a rinse in the shower.

Steve had his pipe out. It sat pursed between his lips as he looked contemplatively into the distance, puffing smoke into the night sky. I sat staring out into the Australian wilderness, wondering what was out beyond the horizon. I knew that the next day, and the next, would be days of discovery, every corner yielding potential and a land that I had not yet cast my eyes on.

Today, 20 years later, I can still take myself there. At times, I close my eyes to remember just what it was like to sit on my little three-legged stool and reflect on a day of cycling.

When I share what it was like to cycle around the world I very rarely talk about the day we started or the day we finished. Those were, of course, significant moments. The Middle, however, was where the story was written. Our mission was to ride a bicycle across Australia, America, the United Kingdom and Europe, and then back down Africa with the aim of talking about and raising

one million rand for children living with and affected by HIV/AIDS in our home province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

The Middle was where we had to face up to what it was going to take to get the job done. The Middle was where we encountered barriers and had to overcome challenges. The Middle was where we had to dig deep and keep going, despite the unwillingness of our minds and bodies. The Middle was where we met new people, experienced new cultures, explored new lands. The Middle was where we found adventure.

We are all in The Middle.

The cycle tour was one of the most significant journeys I have undertaken. In the 20 years since then I have, like you, pitched up at many start lines and entered into many Middles. My wife Toni and I stood together in the front of a church a little over ten years ago and started our marriage. Four years after that day we pitched up at the start line of parenting. Today we are in The Middle of raising Ella (aged six) and Anna (aged two). Since 2005, I have been a part of leading and developing a brand called The Appletree Group, of which The Middle is a part, navigating what it is like to be in The Middle as an entrepreneur. I am in The Middle of being a citizen of South Africa – my birthplace, my home, a country I love dearly despite the many complexities we navigate here. I am in The Middle of being a friend, a brother, a son and, of course, a human being.

We are all in The Middle.

Over the years, as I have shared the cycle tour experience, I have been very particular about ensuring that my audience is clear that cycling around the world is significantly easier than navigating some of The Middles I have mentioned above. I was 18, carefree, had to pedal a bicycle daily, each day discovering new lands. Sure, it came with its challenges which I write about in this book. But there have been many days in the many Middles I have been walking since then where I would rather have been back on my bike.

The Middle is tough, beautiful, challenging, significant and meaningful – all at the same time.

We can all pitch up at start lines, we can all celebrate a finish, but no finish is without a Middle and every Middle is where who we are is revealed. It's in The Middle where we are shaped, where our potential is realised, and ultimately where our stories are written.

This book is dedicated to all of us as we navigate The Middle. For 15 years or so since completing the cycle tour people would ask me if I was going to write a book. To be honest, I struggled with the idea of simply publishing my journey and what I got up to every day. I did keep a diary and have a record of each day stored in a drawer at home. Those are for my kids to read one day. I wasn't sure why people would want to read my diary. I didn't want to write as though I was some sort of courageous adventurer who does things that others can't. In reality, The Middles that many in my country – and around the world – have to navigate daily are far more challenging than cycling around the world.

I felt that if I were to write a book it would need to encourage people and meet them where they were at. It would need to share insights learned from the cycle tour and how those insights apply to areas of life which we all navigate on a daily basis. I wanted the book, in some way, to gather us in the trenches of life and share insights around how to navigate The Middle and arrive at the finishes we desire to reach. I am an adventurer, just like you, adventuring through life.

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

Aside from the obvious turning of each page from right to left, I would encourage you to take your time. Each chapter is a short

read and is broken into two parts. The first is a story from a particular day on the cycle tour. The second shares the insights I gleaned from that day and how those insights have shaped the way I have done life since the tour.

You will notice that the chapters are not arranged chronologically, and that the book is not a linear account of the cycle tour. That is because I have chosen the chapter sequence based on the insights rather than the order of events. I hope this doesn't freak out the overly fastidious amongst us!

At the end of each chapter you will receive an invitation to pause, which is headed *Selah*. *Selah* is Hebrew and has a few meanings. One interpretation is to 'weigh in the balance' and another is 'to pause'. It's used most often in the book of Psalms in the Bible as a way of encouraging the reader to pause and contemplate the words they have just read.

Look, I am no psalmist but, hey, I am going to go ahead and use the term! I decided to include the invitation as I feel the art of pausing and reflecting, or *selah*, is something some of us may either have lost or may never really have practised intentionally.

Acquiring knowledge is relatively easy. Wisdom, however, is the application of knowledge. And for us to live wisely, we need to pause and think about if, how and when we can apply what we have learnt and understood into our daily lives.

Before you move on to the next chapter, I encourage you to think about how what you have read could equip you to navigate *The Middle*. For those who require some support, I have added some thoughts and questions.

Before you get going, consider how you can create space for yourself to digest each chapter. When would it be best to read *The Middle*? What could you do to be present and mindful as you do? How can you be intentional about engaging with each chapter in such a way that you can truly benefit from its pages and think through what they may mean for you?

This is not a book that you read in record time. Take the time you need to wrestle with its content.

You can also join The Middle community by visiting our website or taking a look at our social media channels. Feel free to reach out along your journey and ask any questions you would like to.

I trust you will be encouraged and equipped to navigate The Middle.

Let's get going.





CHAPTER 1

DAY 5

5 JANUARY 1999



**BLOEMFONTEIN – TROMPSBURG
(SOUTH AFRICA)**

123.64 KILOMETRES





Taking a break from the tough ride to Trompsburg.

We spent the first official night of our journey in the Free State town of Parys, just over the border with Gauteng. Parys is the Afrikaans translation of Paris, but it is clear that whoever named this town was not translating from a lived experience of having visited the real deal. Let's call it an ambitious translation. Nevertheless, Parys had charm and will always be the very first town Steve and I arrived at on tour.

After just a day's cycling we had crossed our first provincial border and we would be hosted in someone's home for the first time. Steve had done the ride from Johannesburg to Cape Town before and understood full well that whilst pitching a tent and firing up the gas cooker was all part of the adventure, a comfortable bed, a scrumptious home-cooked meal and good

company at the end of a long day on the bike made the trip just that much sweeter. He had reached out to his network and organised accommodation for us in most of the cities and towns along the way. I never grew tired of meeting new people, listening to their stories and sharing ours.

We left Parys on Day 2 and made our way, mostly through farmland, further into the Free State. We blitzed passed ostriches, cows and fields of sunflowers in full bloom. We crossed over the Tropic of Capricorn, which felt like a rite of passage for any adventurer! Of course, we took pictures. It felt good to be cruising the open road. Just four hours and 90 kilometres later we arrived in Kroonstad to spend the night with the Armstrong family.

The next morning the Armstrongs took hosting to the next level by cycling with us as we left for the small gold mining town of Virginia, a short ride of 69.95 kilometres via the back roads.

On the way there we stopped for lunch in Hennenman. A woman who had seen us on TV came to greet us and gave us R20 towards our cause. Our first official donation! It was a small dent in the grand total we looked to raise, but it was progress. She scuttled off and promptly returned with her two sons, asking if we would pose for a photograph with them. I am not sure if the boys were even interested, but their mum gamely arranged us all for the portrait, focused the 35mm instamatic film camera and snapped a pic for posterity.

I was quite moved – and I'm still not quite certain whether it was because this was our first donation or because it came from this complete stranger, a *platteland* Afrikaans woman with whom I had nothing in common, or both. Her spontaneous act of generosity blew wind in our sails and I felt quite chuffed that our simple daily routine of pushing a bike forward for the sake of others was inspiring enough to warrant a picture with her boys. Day 3 was a breeze and took us just over three hours.

A tail wind pushed us out of Virginia, a welcome start to a day that would see us cover 145.5 kilometres, a little more than double the distance of the day before. The roads had started to get busier as people began to return to work, facing up to another year. We also experienced our first summer storm, which meant navigating some heavy rain as we tackled the last 15 kilometres. We were only four days into our journey and already I felt as though we had had an epic adventure. We had endured sun and storm. We had crossed lines of latitude. We had met people and told our story. We had raised money towards our cause. We had settled into long stretches and found our stride on the bikes. And ahead of us was a full year of this goodness.

And then Day 5 happened.

We woke up in Bloemfontein, 438.75 kilometres from Johannesburg, ready to tackle the next 123.64 kilometres to the small farming town of Trompsburg that would take us ever closer to Cape Town.

This trip – from Bloemfontein to Trompsburg – would be our first time cycling on one of South Africa’s national highways, the N1, since leaving Johannesburg. Our departure from Bloemfontein was met by a cool breeze that swept the earth, a welcome reprieve from the sizzling heat that had accompanied us from the start of our journey. Steve and I, where possible, always left early to knock off as much distance as we could before the day warmed up. Our average speed over the past four days had been 22 kilometres per hour. We were cruising. It felt good. It was just us, our trusty steeds and the world.

As we left Bloemfontein behind us, the breeze grew a little more steadily and consistently than the days before. By the time our bikes were pointing south, we had a headwind bearing down on us exactly *from* where we needed to go. Today the weather was going to push back. The easy start that we had become accustomed to simply hadn’t materialised. It quickly became evident that on this day we were going to have to work hard.

Very hard. The headwind continued to grow in strength and the heat rose in an unwelcome flourish.

The message from the elements seemed quite clear: ‘You two have gone far enough and we’re not on your side!’ But we had resolve and the battle was on. For the first time our legs felt weary and every kilometre passed by achingly slowly.

What really ground me down was how we were scratching for mileage. It was mentally unnerving to grit hard for an hour, pedalling with every ounce of strength, only to discover you’d cycled a mere 13 kilometres. All that work for a measly 13 kilometres! What made it worse was just how many more kilometres lay ahead. When I started doing the maths – calculating our average speed and the distance we still had left to travel – my heart sank.

At around 30 kilometres into the ride, a sense of dread washed over me. Of all the feelings I had anticipated and experienced up until then – excitement, trepidation, awe, wonderment, pride – dread was not one of them. For the first time I felt as though reaching our destination was unachievable. I was consumed with doubt. The remaining distance seemed impossible.

There had been tough moments during the first four days but they were overshadowed by the euphoria of the great adventure we had embarked on. We had been wrapped up in the epic start, the recognition, the adventure of it all. Now the toughness was being amplified.

Day 5 brought me face to face with how gruelling this tour was going to be. All my visions of grandeur were fading and being replaced by the harsh reality of what it was actually going to take to pedal a bicycle between all the exotic destinations I had spent the past few months dreaming about. Even the water in our hydration packs had not been spared the unremitting heat. I sucked the tepid liquid resentfully as I staved off dehydration. I saw very little, given my head was permanently down, avoiding

the onslaught of the wind, and the dust and insects swept along by its force.

The public seemed to have developed amnesia – no, worse, apathy. Cars raced past us without a hoot or a wave. I envied their pace, their comfort – their windscreens – and their ability to get to where we were hoping to be in just a matter of minutes. We still had hours left on the road. What I would’ve given for a pat on the back and an ice-cold Coca-Cola! We were now two cyclists, heads down, pushing as hard as they could towards the goal, unsupported, unacknowledged and completely alone.

The narrative in my head began to shift. Up until then, while on the bike, I had spent most of the day thinking about what was to come. I dreamt about crossing Australia, the USA, the UK and Europe and, finally, the grand traverse down Africa. I tried to imagine the terrain we would cover. I planned the talks that we would give. I wondered about the different people we would meet, who I would encounter and what strange and interesting moments we would enjoy.

And – even though it was so far away – I would occasionally picture our homecoming. We would ride back down the very road we had pedalled out of Johannesburg, almost 365 days later, having successfully completed both the distance and the goal of raising one million rand for the children. Friends and family, possibly even some strangers, would line the streets and cheer as two rugged adventurers returned home.

On Day 5, all of that disappeared and I was left wondering whether I would even make it to the very next town.

My mind wrestled with questions.

Can I actually do this?

Was this whole thing a mistake?

Why am I here?

Will this be all that I thought it would be?

As much as I tried, I could simply not avoid the questions. This mental onslaught was as unrelenting in its intensity as the weather.

Moving forward became an even greater fight.

In that moment, pushing into the Karoo, I realised that maybe I had got caught up in a dream without truly understanding the reality of what it would take to realise it. Had I been swept up in a pipe dream? Now it was real and all of a sudden it didn't feel good. I didn't know if I had what it would take to do what I had set out to do; nor did I feel that I could sustain the motivation to carry on.

The elements were forcing me to dig deep, but did I even have the depth? I was 17 years old. Steve was 28 and had a decade more life experience and a whole lot more travel time on his bicycle. I realised there was a chasm between us when it came to grit and perseverance. I reflected on how boldly I had stood before friends and strangers prior to the tour, proclaiming the adventure with passion and pride.

Now I wanted to take back every word and crawl into a hole. If only I could travel back in time and put all those '*ordinary people can do extraordinary things*' speeches back in their boxes. Those adventures were for proper adventurers, not rookies like me. Kilometre by kilometre, the vision for the cycle tour faded and was replaced by visions of someone stopping to pick me up and take me home in their air-conditioned vehicle. I craved my home. I craved my friends. I craved my mom's home-cooked meals. I craved comfort. I craved relief.

And there, out in the middle of nowhere, I realised that I could very well fail.

While the war raged on in my mind, I kept going, choosing commitment and momentum rather than abandoning my post. It really was the only option. On second thoughts, maybe it wasn't. But the other options were decidedly less viable and definitely less appealing. There was absolutely no glory in giving up.

Our average speed produced meagre results for our effort. The horizon felt as though it was a million miles away but, metre by metre, we pressed on towards the goal.

And then we saw it. There in all its glory was the road sign marking the off-ramp to Trompsburg.

Relief.

Day 5 was finally almost over. We pedalled off the highway and up the off-ramp, our last uphill push of the day. We reached a T-junction, pulled over to the side of the road, and dropped our heads onto our handlebars. Neither of us spoke or moved for what felt like an eternity. In that moment, where we reflected on what had just happened, silence and stillness was our friend.

Finally, we looked up at each other – there was no need to speak – and stood up straight. We lifted ourselves back onto our saddles, clipped into our pedals and pushed them down once more. We drifted slowly into town, with the *whirrrrr* of our bikes the soundtrack to our journey's end.

THE MIDDLE INSIGHT

EVERY START HAS A DAY 5. KEEP GOING.

We humans love the idea of a fresh new start. Starts feel good. New feels good. A new job yields positive expectations about a career path or a better working environment. A new girlfriend or boyfriend gets us all excited about love and the possibilities that exist with our new relationship. A new city, a new project, a new business – into which we invest a great deal of optimism – brimming with possibilities and the prospect of fulfilling what we set out to achieve. Even our possessions feel good when they are new. I know all too well that sense of anticipation and sheer



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delight that goes with trying out a brand new surfboard or a pair of trail-running shoes. All the positive emotions, all the good feels.

New feels good.

Leaving Johannesburg on 1 January 1999 was one of my biggest ever ‘new’ moments, but it certainly was not the last. All my starts, in some way, have held my dreams, desires and expectations. I started my relationship with my wife Toni 18 years ago. I started university. I started working. I started my businesses. I started leading at my local church. I started projects. I started new sports. All of those starts, just like the cycle tour, have been exhilarating and full of expectation, precisely because of the potential that each of those starts could realise.

Starts feel good.

Yet only five days into the cycle tour my positive emotions disappeared. The optimism, the certainty, the hope that came with my new start were replaced, in a moment, with frustration, doubt and despair. That moment was tough.

That moment when the start ceases to dish out the good feelings; when you consider that you may have made a mistake by starting what you did in the first place. That moment when the old seems better than the new and the start that held your hopes and dreams may actually not deliver on them. That moment when you consider what it is going to take to finish what you started and when the goal, all of a sudden, feels completely unattainable.

That moment when you ask yourself: *What have I done? Why am I here?*

These are ‘Day 5’ moments.

Day 5 is when you know you are in The Middle. The newness has worn off. The euphoria has faded away. All the perceptions you had about what you had started begin to explode, and you come face to face with what you actually signed up for.

And it’s not what you expected to see.

The emotions we feel at our respective starts are based on our perception of what's to come. I entered this cycling adventure with a perception of what it was going to be like to travel the world; to arrive home after having raised a million rand; to be a global adventurer. I perceived what each day on the road would entail.

We do this at every start. We perceive how our marriages, careers, or life in a new country will unfold. We perceive the type of family we will build or what freedom we will experience when we start our own business. We perceive what our new romance will yield or what it would mean to resign from our job. We even perceive how we will surf on a new board or navigate a mountain in those new shoes!

We desire good for our lives. As a result, we very rarely embark on a new venture with negative expectations. We may weigh up the pros and cons and be aware of certain limitations. We can reasonably account for potential pitfalls, but we can't truly feel or gauge our response to them until we actually experience them. Because we desire good – and imagine the best outcome – for our efforts, our perceptions are mostly positive and so too are the accompanying emotions.

But Day 5 will come.

It's the tough space in your marriage that you didn't plan for. It's the cash flow issues in your business that you thought you could avoid. It's the frustrating boss who overshadows the positive aspects of your job. It's the unforeseen relational tension with colleagues. It's the lack of buy-in from the people you had hoped would join you on the journey. It's the financial or sales targets you didn't meet. It's the sickness you didn't plan for. It's the hurdles and barriers that stand in the way of your goal.

Day 5 moments are raw, difficult and real. And they don't always last just one day.



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I have experienced a multitude of Day 5s since 5 January 1999, and have resolved within myself that a Day 5 pretty much follows every start. It may take a few days, months, or even a few years but, once you start something, Day 5 will come.

Today I spend my days growing and developing a brand called The Appletree Group. The brand itself was born on the cycle tour. As the author of the vision, I have always been invested in its success and passionate about what the brand could achieve. Yet the last few years have been some of the most difficult I have had to endure. Owning a business is not a walk in the park. For many, being self-employed is the dream. It offers autonomy, unlimited leave, the ability to do what you love to do, annual dividends and various other perks. And I have certainly enjoyed some of those perks over the years.

I also know what it feels like not to draw a salary for up to six months due to cash flow challenges. I know the despair of coming home to a family for whom I am unable to provide the very things that they need to thrive. I know what it feels like to be awake in the early hours of the morning fraught with worry and anxiety about how you are going to turn things around. In those moments, one's mind begins to spiral downward, going from worrying about cash flow and growing a business, to worrying about developing anxiety-related health problems because of the anxiety you're experiencing!

The Middle is very often tough.

There have been days when I genuinely wished to wake up sick. There were workshops I had hoped would simply be cancelled so I could avoid being the facilitator, sitting in front of people, doing what I have always loved to do, but at the time did not have the energy to face. There were patches that felt relentless, as though the responsibility and effort it took to maintain and grow a business were just too much. I have always wanted to do the work that I do. But, during my Day 5 periods, I found myself feeling like I did on the bike on 5 January – everything was an

effort and a headwind was pushing back hard on me. All I wanted to do was escape.

And so the Day 5 questions sit unanswered for prolonged periods of time:

Will this get better?

How did I get here?

Why did I start this in the first place?

Where can I go to escape this reality?

There was a time I even contemplated moving to Thailand with my family to become a subsistence farmer! Despite how committed I had always been to my work, and my investment in Appletree's success, I felt very willing to let it go and start something new. Because a new start would come with the good feelings I so desperately wanted and none of the despair of the bleak reality I faced at the time. The temptation for all of us during our Day 5 moments, as it was for me on 5 January 1999, is to escape, to go somewhere new.

But a Day 5 will follow a new start.

It would be worthwhile considering that we may possibly lose out on something significant by allowing our Day 5 moments to initiate the pursuit of a new start. Where will it leave us if we escape every time perception and reality don't line up?

All of us, to a greater or lesser degree, pursue sustained goodness. As soon as restlessness – often fuelled by dissatisfaction – sets in, we rely on a new start as the pathway to sustained satisfaction and fulfilment. We convince ourselves that a new context – a thrilling relationship, a job we don't dread, or an exciting city – is what would make us feel good most of the time, consistently meet our needs and help us to thrive.

It's easy to become addicted to new starts.

But what if the satisfaction we crave could be found within the very same place that happened to be the source of our frustration? Right there in The Middle.

The cycle tour as a whole both met and exceeded my expectations. It was a significant year and that significance, I believe, was because of the mix of despair and joy; anger and peace; restlessness and satisfaction; frustration and relief; the good, tough and easy that I experienced during the entire tour. There is simply no significant life story that is devoid of this mix.

If I had given up at any one of those low points, during any one of my Day 5s, I would have robbed myself of the overall experience that has shaped who I am today. I would have robbed myself of the achievement of a significant goal. I would have robbed the Lily of the Valley Children's Home and the Sinikithemba Project of the money that we were able to raise for them. My bad days were simply part of the whole experience and I could only have found the good if I had kept going.

There were days when the fight to keep going was gruelling. On more than one occasion I had felt so mentally and physically depleted that I pulled over and threw my bike to the ground in frustration and defeat, and declared: 'I am done with this!'

But all that being defeatist does is leave you stuck in the middle of nowhere, hopeless and without a plan, resigned to a fate that need not be yours.

I would look around me at the Australian, American or African wilderness and realise that no one other than me was going to get me out of the place I was in. I would get back on the bike and push on. Apathy gets us nowhere. Standing still will not move us into a better space.

My strategy in those moments was to keep going. I knew that avoiding or escaping what lay ahead of me was a bad choice. And I have continued to apply the same strategy in my life since then. In those tough and dark periods of my career when I felt like I was going nowhere or not performing, or struggling to find the energy and passion to lead, I knew that each day I still had to get out of bed, shower, change, eat and go. Go to work. Go to my

workshop. Go to that group of people waiting for me. Go to our team meeting.

If you are reading this book it means that I managed to finish it! There were days when I would sit down to write and nothing worth reading would materialise. Sometimes this would happen for several days at a time. I would succumb to ‘writer’s block’ and tell myself that the book was going nowhere. I could give up. I wanted to give up. But I didn’t. I opened up my laptop and continued.

Keep going.

I am by no means advocating that anyone remains in a context that is so toxic or negative that they are in a constant Day 5 or that we should simply keep going, unhappily, into toxic futures. It simply isn’t healthy to sit in a prolonged Day 5 space. It will only lead to some form of health issue like depression. I can also attest to the fact that while I often ended up enjoying the work that I tried to avoid, it wasn’t easy being in that disengaged space.

But I do believe that we make better decisions while we are moving than if we have checked out and escaped. Keep yourself in the game and make some calls. Keep up the momentum in The Middle. **Sometimes we simply have to wrestle while we ride.** Reflecting back on Day 5 of the tour, I know now that I would have wasted precious time by standing on the side of the road wrestling with my thoughts rather than moving. If we move, we go somewhere and somewhere often holds the answers that we are not going to find if we stand still and give up.

Keep going.

Today, despite some familiar challenges, things are moving ahead and I am gaining ground in the pursuit of my goals. In these moments I can look back on the challenging Day 5s and refer to them as gifts. Why? Because each challenge reinforces that what I am doing matters and that it is in fact worthwhile. Each time we have to overcome a hurdle, we grow, we develop;



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we gain strength and muscle memory. We are able to approach another hurdle with ‘hurdle wisdom’, with more resolve.

I have long since abandoned the idea that what I desire will be achieved easily. There is always a cost. But that cost, those barriers, those moments that require us to dig deep – to make every effort to persevere mentally, physically, beyond the limits we’ve set – are what count. They produce the results that the good times cannot produce.

We celebrate a long marriage because we know the tenacity required to make it work. We celebrate a successful business because we know the discipline needed to navigate those waters. We celebrate the accomplishment of audacious goals because we recognise the courage it took to achieve them. We celebrate those who overcome obstacles. If everything came easily, our achievements wouldn’t exactly be achievements. It’s the tough stuff that makes our finishes so significant.

Perhaps for some it’s time to quit the escaping, stay the course and dig deeper than ever before. Perhaps some simply need to know that despite being in the midst of navigating a difficult Day 5 period, relief will come. By choosing to push on through the barriers, significant finishes will become our reality – our normal.

We will be remembered for how we’ve navigated our Day 5s – The Middle. That’s our legacy. By digging deep, we get to include significant finishes – and the joy we derive from them – in the narrative of our lives. And these finishes may not only enrich our lives but impact the lives of the people around us.

So, for all of those who are in the midst of a Day 5 right now, I know that you identify with what we felt on 5 January 1999, 30 kilometres into a 123.64 kilometre ride.

Keep going.

Day 6 will come.

SELAH

(If you don't know what this means, you haven't read the Introduction! I am not offended, I usually skip it as well! But I encourage you to start there this time.)

1. Reflect on your current willingness to keep going. Be honest with yourself about your current levels of motivation in the various Middles you are navigating. Perhaps choose one at a time and consider where you are at with each one; your marriage, relationship, job, business or even a project.
2. Try to identify what is causing your current Day 5 in any of The Middles you are journeying through right now. Is it the economy, lack of sales, finances, a sickness, a difficult person or an autocratic boss?
3. Think back. Are there any common Day 5s that seem to trip you up repeatedly? For me, a lack of cash flow or financial challenges would always derail me. I had to learn to approach my finances differently and seek advice so as to ensure that a financial challenge didn't cause me to want to give up.
4. Lastly, what can you do to maintain momentum? Out of the list of Day 5s there are going to be some factors you simply can't control. Rather focus on what you can influence. How can you proactively deal with the Day 5s that are within your means to deal with? What next steps can you take? It may mean booking a meeting with a mentor so as to receive a different perspective, or perhaps seeking advice from an entrepreneur who has dealt with the factors you are facing right now. It may be marriage counselling. It may be a small retreat to reconsider your product line with your team. It may be checking in with your clients and asking for feedback. It may just be time to get proactive. So what can you do?



THE MIDDLE

At times it is simply about maintaining momentum. Hour by hour. Day by day. Don't give up or check out no matter how tough it is. Keep going. Breakthrough will come. The remaining chapters include insights which are helpful in dealing with our Day 5s so keep what you have written in mind as we go forward from here.