

Moving Beyond Happy, Sad, or Angry: Two Books that Expand Our Emotional Repertoire

Amy Miracle,
Broad Street Presbyterian Church, Columbus, Ohio

Most people recognize only three emotions: happy, sad, and angry. Our actual emotional life is so much richer than that. *The Field Guide to Emotions: A Practical Orientation to 150 Essential Emotions*, written by Dan Newby and Curtis Watkins, invites us to expand our emotional palette. This book identifies 150 emotions, including ambivalence, anguish, confusion, exuberance, incredulity, mischievousness, serenity, and wonder.

This isn't a book to read; it's a book to explore. It's a book to have handy when you feel stuck or find yourself circling the drain, or when someone asks you, "How are you feeling?" and you struggle to come up with an answer. After having a pastoral care conversation with someone and you are searching for words to help, you'd better understand their emotions.

For each of the 150 emotions, the authors name our typical reaction when we experience the emotion, the purpose of the emotion, and the time orientation of the emotion—whether it is referring to the past, present, or future. Also included is a helpful summary of how the emotion might get in the way and other emotions we might confuse it with. In addition, there are categories that highlight what's happening within our bodies when we experience the emotion.

Looking at emotions this way has been transformative for me. I now embrace the idea that emotions are not good or bad, positive or negative. We may find some emotions easier than others, but all of them have something to teach us.

Another book that I recommend is Brene Brown's most recent project entitled *Atlas of the Heart: Mapping Meaningful Connects and the Language of Human Experience*. In a break from her previous books, this one is physically beautiful, with color and images and full page quotes. She sets out to show her readers how accurately naming emotions gives us the power of understanding, meaning, and choice. She covers eighty-seven emotions in her trademark style that combines storytelling, references to popular culture, and research. My favorite part of the book is how she organizes the emotions by chapter. For example, Chapter 1 covers "Places We Go When Things are Uncertain or Too Much" and includes the emotions of stress, being overwhelmed, anxiety, worry, avoidance, excitement, dread, fear, and vulnerability. Chapter 2 focuses on "Places We Go When We Compare" and includes another set of emotions. Her thirteen chapters cover a lot of ground including "Places We Go When We're Hurting" and "Places We Go When We Search for Connection."

There is emerging research that shows our ability to name an emotion helps us regulate it. That makes both of these books interesting and useful resources for those who hope to lead and live in this world.