

Dear Reader,

In a sea of constant uncertainty and change, **ATLAS OF THE HEART** is a book about finding the solid ground within us, and safely navigating our way back to ourselves and to each other. This book offers a collection of tools, including new language that helps us more accurately talk about our emotions and experiences and a new model for cultivating meaningful connection.



Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote, “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.” We’ve collected data for over two decades that shows that many of us have very limited vocabularies when it comes to identifying human emotion and experience. In fact, when asked how many emotions they could recognize and name in their own experiences, our research participants said three: mad, sad, and happy.

What does it mean if the vastness of human emotion and experience can be expressed only as one of these three affects? What about shame, disappointment, wonder, awe, disgust, embarrassment, despair, contentment, boredom, anxiety, stress, love, overwhelm, surprise, and all the other emotions and experiences that define what it means to be human?

Without accurate language, we struggle to get the help we need, we don’t always regulate or manage our emotions and experiences in a way that allows us to move through them productively, and our self-awareness is limited.

Doing this research and writing this book has taught me that our emotions and experiences are layers of biology, biography, behavior, and backstory. Every single day, our feelings and experiences show up in our bodies. They’re shaped by where we come from and how we were raised. They drive how we show up. And each feeling has its own unique backstory. Understanding these emotions and experiences is our life’s work. The more we learn, the deeper we can continue to explore.

The real gift of expanding our language, practicing this work, and cultivating meaningful connection is being able to go anywhere without the fear of getting lost. When fear, anxiety, and uncertainty leave us feeling adrift and untethered in our lives—and God knows we’ve felt plenty of that in the past few years—our first instinct is to look out into the distance to find the nearest shore. But the shore isn’t something outside of us—the solid ground we’re seeking is within us. It’s not always easy to find, but it’s there. I believe the more confident we are about being able to navigate to that place, the more daring our adventures and the more connected we are to ourselves and to each other.

Atlas of the Heart is an actionable framework for cultivating this kind of meaningful connection. It takes us on a journey through eighty-seven emotions and experiences that define what it means to be human and maps out the language and tools necessary to access a universe where we can share and steward the stories of our bravest and most heartbreaking moments with one another.

Stay awkward, brave, and kind.

Brené Brown



Penguin
Random
House