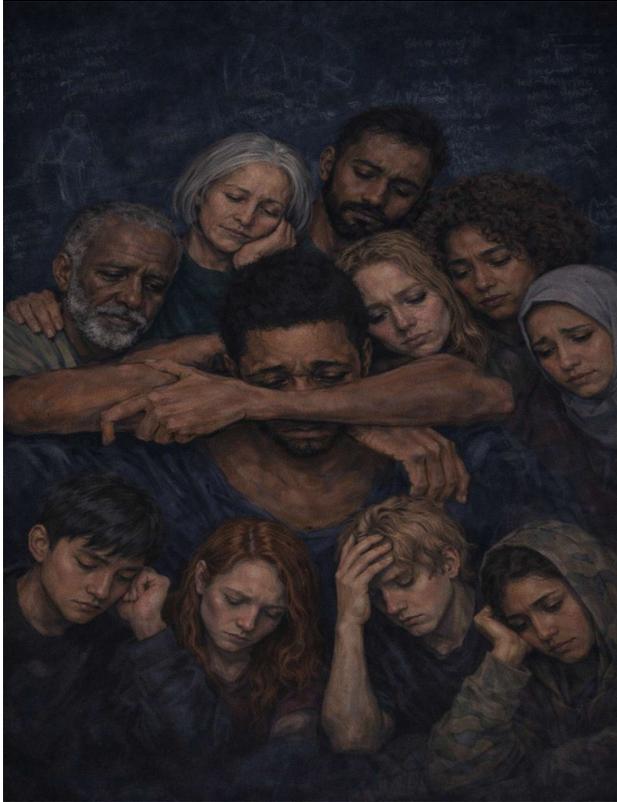


# Seeing Beneath the Surface



AI generate art using art owned by Artist-Joe Below the Brim

An unknown author once wrote, “The courage to challenge what’s familiar is often the first step toward what’s truly fulfilling.” Choosing this image for the cover of our workbook was an act of courage in itself. Some may not immediately connect the symbolic metaphor in using a Black male to represent the Baobab Tree. Yet, just like the Baobab Tree, the male represents endurance, resilience, and attempting to survive within some of the most extreme environments.

Unlike any other group or ethnicity, black men carry the burden and emotional weight to be strong, to stay silent, to “push through,” and to handle pain without support.

When you observe the cover of this book, many may simply see a black male carrying pain, confusion, and possibly a defeated state of mind based on his posture. Unfortunately, many feel like this is their only option, because sharing feelings can feel like an invitation to ridicule. Society has stereotyped the expression of emotion by men to be weak, and strength to reflect emotion as a label of being “weak.” If he feels weary along the way, the need for rest is seen as “lazy.” Letting someone else lead, just for a moment, can be misread as being “less of a man.” These pressures often create racing thoughts, defeated body language, and isolation.

What is ironic is that the experiences and feelings that are spoken in this picture are not limited to one gender, race, or group. The weight of depression may look and feel different, but the weight that is carried is portrayed differently. If you look at the picture to the left, notice their posture and the appearance of pain that they carry. The heaviness of silence that they carry appears to weigh like chains on their heart, mind, and soul, with no one to help alleviate it. For many women, the weight of responsibility can feel like she must always be strong. The expectation to fulfill obligations, balancing career, taking care of home, and fulfilling personal needs if time permits. Under that kind of pressure, it’s easy to feel lost, overwhelmed, and unsure of who you are outside of the societal standards that you’re forced to meet and maintain.

This image reflects what so many people have felt at some point in life. When you can remove a face within this image and place yourself inside the picture, and then widen the frame to include others, you begin to see how common these burdens truly are.

This cover normalizes what many hide – their emotions, deep pain, limited support, and social responses that often intensify the hurt that we feel, instead of healing it. This workbook is an invitation to notice the pain that we carry, question the standards that society demands silence, and begin a journey of healing and redirection, so that you can start to live an autonomous life.