The financial crisis has become a global phenomenon. Everyone, including the experts, has issued warnings that we should be prepared. Next year will not be better, and the worst is yet to come.

We are worried and saddened when our life savings suddenly plummet. News headlines are preoccupied with big corporations going bankrupt and banks announcing layoffs of tens of thousands of employees. The big three U.S. automakers are still struggling to stay afloat, and the jobs of millions of people are on the line. In addition, the Dow has plummeted below 8,000 points. Investors are deeply troubled by the gloomy prospect of the economy. Watching the departure of co-workers casts a long shadow that hovers and never seems to dissipate. These economic fears have spread worldwide. Recently, there has been a call by Hong Kong churches to set up support teams to prevent suicides.

Under these dire circumstances, however, the Bible teaches us to “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must
finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” (James 1:2-4)

Facing trials is a difficult task. The Bible says that we should consider it pure joy. How can we ever reach such joy in the midst of troubles and sorrows?

A spiritual person is discerning. But who is a spiritual person? She/he is a person who belongs to God and is one who uses a spiritual perspective to discern and see through worldly things. Who can be joyful in trials and sorrows? A spiritual person is able to be joyful by not focusing on transient and present suffering but focuses on the eternal well being. Trials bring along opportunities to persevere and to rely upon God. We may lose a lot now, but that loss is actually beneficial to our eternal lives.

If stiff punishment can bring about change in life, we can be grateful despite the pain. If a major surgery brings full bodily recovery, we should be thankful regardless of what it takes. An athlete is excited to take part in the Olympics in spite of the difficult training involved. It is worthwhile simply because of the chance to participate in such an event and to see personal progress being made. All the setbacks and sacrifices become meaningful and invaluable. Nothing comes close to the excitement and happiness. It is the athlete’s lifetime goal.

Spiritual people can be at peace and have joy during times of trial because they have a higher calling in achieving eternal glory. They see beyond the superficial and know that harsh trials and training are needed. It is advantageous to our eternal lives because we go through these trials to develop perseverance and faith in God.

Rev. Gordon Siu once encouraged brothers and sisters, saying, “we invariably suffer losses in trials (money, health or comfort zone), but the Bible says we are not lacking anything. God does not look at the temporary ‘losses’ the same way we do, but He looks at the ‘gains’ we will attain in eternity. When we alter our way of thinking and see that losses are actually gains, our sorrow will be soothed and comforted.”

One may ask, “What if we do not have such spiritual insight and faith in God?” James says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you” (James 1:5). The saddest thing would be for one to go through trials but never acquire spiritual insight, faith in God and the lessons of eternal life. This would be a person who goes about his own life, gets into trouble, and yet is unwilling to change. He acts as if nothing has ever happened at all. He is like the turbulent waves in the open ocean which stubbornly struggle with its own power. He rejects the lesson of total submission and trust in God. His faith is unnecessarily shattered.

Experts say anxiety is a powerful emotional stronghold. It renders us helpless and unable to let go. The one who lacks spiritual perspective and wisdom from God will never be able to overcome and rise above the turmoil. Therefore, when facing trials and times of crisis, one fights in vain without faith and pure reliance on God. He can only see the overwhelming danger ahead but not the hidden new opportunity.

Brothers and sisters, may
we be spiritually discerning people. With God’s wisdom, we can be joyful in all trials. We should work together and strive for His kingdom and righteousness, deposit our wealth in heaven, and serve God diligently.

I pray that we can take this opportunity to be spiritual people. There are souls to be saved in this time of recession. We need to spread the gospel and lead people to Christ.

Footnote
(1) “Words from the Pastor” North Point Alliance Church in Hong Kong, October 18, 2008.

Although God promises that He will give us His perfect peace when we keep our thoughts on Him and trust Him (Is. 26:3), Christians still suffer from depression. Mild depression is probably the most common emotional problem in the United States today. It is estimated that serious depression affects one out of every five people at some time during their lives.

The symptoms of depression include apathy, fatigue mixed with insomnia, difficulty in concentrating, a loss of pleasure and interest. When depression hits us, we tend to focus almost exclusively on ourselves and on our problems. Every molehill looks like a mountain. We feel that no one really understands us – not even God.

At the heart of depression is a feeling of hopelessness. Abraham Lincoln felt that his future was hopeless when he was a young lawyer in the Middle West. During this time, he wrote, “I am now the most miserable man living. Whether I shall ever be better, I cannot tell. I awfully forebode I shall not.”

Causes of Depression

Depression may have spiritual, physical or psychological causes. I want to touch on each of these and consider some ways we can deal with depression so that when we’re down, we won’t be out.

Spiritual

King David revealed that his struggles with depression resulted from sin. For example, in Psalm 38:3-8 he lamented, “there is no health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities are gone over my head; as a heavy burden they weigh too much for me … I am bent over and greatly bowed down; I go mourning all day long … I am benumbed and badly crushed; I groan because of the agitation of my heart.”

The Good News is good news in part because when Jesus saves us, He delivers us from the
depressing impact of a life weighed down by sin. But Christians who allow themselves to become enmeshed in sin may experience turmoil. They discover that when we know to do good but don’t do it, we often feel guilty and depressed. David explained this clearly in Psalm 32:3-4. “When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me. My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer.”

The way to joy is obedience. In John 15:10-11 Jesus says, “If you obey my commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have obeyed My Father’s commands and remain in His love.” Sometimes we become depressed when God seems far away, but we are not knowingly sinning. This may occur during a time of spiritual testing, when we feel as if God has abandoned us just when everything is going wrong. The reason for this frightening experience may be found in Satan’s horrible but enlightening conversation with God about Job’s faith (Job 1-2). There appears to be times when God closed Heaven’s door in order to prove the faithfulness and perseverance of His beloved children.

Physical
Depression is sometimes due to physical factors such as fatigue. In 1 Kings 18-19, we read of Elijah’s historic showdown with 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah on Mount Carmel. God’s thrashing of these false gods of Jezebel led her to seek Elijah’s life. He fled into the wilderness and collapsed under a broom tree, where he asked God to let him die.

Elijah was physically and emotionally exhausted. How did God respond? With a sermon on spiritual steadfastness in the face of an irate woman? No. He sent an angel with bread and water who simply said to Elijah, “Arise, eat” (1 Kings 19:5).

Biochemical disturbances also appear to play a role in depression. Substances known as biogenic amines act as the “on” part of a delicate switch system attached to each of the 10 billion nerve cells in our brain. These substances aid the passage of nerve signals across the tiny gaps between cells and synapses. Depressed people appear to have a deficiency of biogenic amines. The result is that too many nerve cells are switched off, and the person is unhappy, lacks energy and suffers from other symptoms of depression. Also, depressed people may have problems metabolizing sodium and potassium which may interfere with the electrical activity of their nerve cells.

Psychological
There are at least six psychological causes of depression.

(1) Unfulfilled expectations and dreams. All of us have dreams or hopes. Unfortunately, many of them don’t pan out. Maybe we don’t make it to the top of the corporate ladder; our children don’t grow up to be who we wanted them to be; or we don’t find satisfaction in the things on which we have banked our lives.

There are many reasons for unfulfilled expectations. Among them are perfectionism, burnout, self-limitations and external influences that are beyond our control. Perfectionism robs us of joy, because we are never satisfied with ourselves or with others. For the perfectionist, there is never a job well done or a sense of fulfillment. People who burn out tend to have very “large” dreams and work hard to achieve them. Usually, their expectations are too grand, though, and they end up being disillusioned. Self-limitations such as a lack of required skills, age, personality, gender, educational background or work experience, and health problems may rob us of the realization of our dreams. Finally, external factors such as the politics of our work place or the erratic nature of the economy may dash our fondest hopes.

(2) Another psychological cause
of depression is loss (of possessions, loved ones, health or reputation). Job experienced depression when he lost his valued possessions. In one day, virtually all of his donkeys, oxen, sheep, camels and servants were destroyed. He went from prince to pauper in just a few hours. But that wasn’t all. Job also lost his loved ones. As a result of a great wind, he lost all ten of his children at once.

The loss of a cherished person through death, divorce, a broken marriage engagement or a move is one of life’s most traumatic and depressing experiences. We are made to love and to be loved. When we lose a close relationship, part of us dies, too.

A third type of loss that can cause depression is the loss of health. This may be sudden, through an accident or assault, or gradual, through disease. Job experienced this loss when the Lord gave Satan permission to ruin his health, and Job was smitten with boils.

Finally, Job had to face the loss of his reputation.

The result of these combined losses was a period of depression. Job cursed the day of his birth and cried, “For what I fear comes upon me, and what I dread befalls me. I am not at ease, nor am I quiet, and I am not at rest, but turmoil comes” (Job 3:25-26).

(3) A third psychological cause of depression is helplessness or the feeling that things are out of control. This can come about as waves of demands are placed on us that we have little to say about. Maybe our bosses just pile things on, and we can never seem to get out on top. For many young women, the seemingly endless needs of young children make them feel as if they are slowly sinking in quicksand.

Another side to feeling that things are out of control is when one thing after another goes wrong. In the first three months after one of our moves our heating system died, our kitchen stove needed replacing, our kids broke two front windows, our house in the city we moved from didn’t sell, and our plumbing system went on strike twice in one month – once with a houseful of company.

Frankly, our psychological ship began sinking. We wondered why we had ever moved and we struggled with depression. Fortunately, things improved, and the Lord began affirming our choice in many different ways.

Finally, our eating or drinking may be out of control, plunging us into depression due to a loss of self-respect.

(4) Depression is also caused by pessimism or negativistic thinking. As the old saying goes, the optimist sees the doughnut, while the pessimist sees the hole! A lot of us prime the pump of depression by looking at the holes. We stand in the shade when we could be sitting in the sunshine. It’s so easy to be critical, to complain, to look at the things that aren’t the way we’d like them to be. And yet, when we do that, we rob ourselves of joy.

(5) Another significant cause of depression is feeling worthless. This may be due to rejection by others, to a lack of purpose in our lives or to a misperception of our value. For example, many senior citizens in our country struggle with depression because they feel that they’re not worth anything anymore. Our society encourages these feelings of worthlessness, unlike other societies that revere the aged.

(6) Finally, suppressed anger – anger that is kept in and not properly channeled – causes depression in thousands of people. Often this anger is a result of rejection by others or of unresolved conflicts with friends and family. This is a special danger in Christian circles, because we are usually taught that all expressions of anger are sinful. The only option is to deny that we are angry and to keep our anger festering inside. Unfortunately, psychologists have consistently found that bottling anger often leads to psychosomatic illnesses, such as migraine headaches or ulcers, and to depression. Regardless of its cause, all depression has a serious effect on our spiritual lives. It trips
us and casts us headlong; it paralysis us and makes us useless in God’s work.

How, then, can we deal with it? How can we prevent it? What follows are brief guidelines for dealing with each of the three types of depression.

**Dealing with Depression**

**Spiritually Caused**

If your depression is due to sin, and you’re not a Christian, you need to experience the joy of being freed from the burden of sin. Ask Jesus to be your Savior and Deliverer, and repent of your sin.

If you are a Christian, live a life of integrity – don’t walk at odds with your faith and with God’s Spirit. When you sin, confess it and turn from it.

If God seems far away and yet you’re following Him, it may be your time of testing. Take heart. If God is testing you, it is because He trusts you and wants you to be a trophy of His grace.

**Physically Caused**

Realize that taking care of yourself physically – eating properly, exercising, getting enough sleep – is crucial for your emotional and spiritual well-being.

**Psychologically Caused**

If your depression is due to unfulfilled expectations and dreams, try to accept the fact that no one, not even you, will ever receive all that he expects, desires or thinks he deserves in life. Be thankful for those things that do turn out as you’ve hoped. Lower your sights a bit, but work on developing new skills that will help you realize a few of your fondest dreams. Let your disappointments become opportunities for God to bathe you in His grace and perhaps give you new dreams that are more fully His dreams for you.

If your depression is due to loss, cast your care and your loneliness on the Father. Psalm 68:19 reminds us that the Lord daily bears our burdens. Isaiah 53 tells us that Jesus bore our grief and carried our sorrows on the cross, that by his wounds we are healed. Avoid self-pity. “Why?” is a question that simply can’t be answered in most cases of loss. If you are feeling that things are out of control, remember that God is in control, and He personally cares about you. He hasn’t walked out on you.

If you are inclined toward pessimism, start taking Philippians 4:8 seriously: “Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and anything worthy of praise, let you mind dwell on these things.”

Put this into practice now and to-morrow will be brighter.

If you are feeling worthless, ask the Lord to show you His purpose for your life and to make you valuable for Him. One of the wonderful things about being part of God’s family is that He uses each of His children in special ways. You count! If you feel worthless because others who are important to you have rejected you, remember that Jesus loves you. Immerse yourself in passages like Psalm 22.

If you have unresolved conflict, get them straightened out so that anger isn’t breeding and festering inside you. Remember that the expression of anger in itself is not wrong. The Bible says, “Be angry, but sin not” (Eph. 4:26). There are appropriate and constructive ways to express anger.

**Five Biblical Principles**

In closing, I would like to leave you with several biblical principles that will help you when you are down so that you can more readily get up and continue the race.

(1) Loss and disappointments are a part of life; they became an inescapable part of everyone’s life after man’s fall from grace.

(2) God is still in control. There is hope. As David put it in Psalm 30:11, “You turned my wailing into
dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy.”

(3) God’s purposes go beyond our immediate pleasure. Job knew this when he answered the Lord, “I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted” (Job 42:1-2).

(4) God loves us. He will not abandon us. He cares for each of us. Psalm 55:22 exhorts us to “cast [our] burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain [us]; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.”

(5) God will restore us. Eventually He will reward us for our faithfulness. He did it for Job (Job 42), and He did it for David (Ps. 40). He will do it for you and for me.

You see, God is able to use disappointments and “bad” events like hammer blows to drive us to Himself so that we won’t be pulled apart again. We need to see the blows of life as being from His hands, the hands of the Master Carpenter. He isn’t out to hurt us, but to make us into something beautiful.

For Further Reading


Dr. Craig W. Ellison has recently retired from teaching at Alliance Theological Seminary and Alliance Graduate School of Counseling. He and his wife, Sharon, have moved to Michigan. Dr. Ellison was the Professor of Counseling & Urban Studies at ATS, and the Director of AGSC.
"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." (Matt 4:19)

Last year, I was invited to a birthday party on a fishing boat. This was interesting to me because I would often hear about people going fishing and loving it. I had gone fishing with my parents’ friends when I was young and had never held a fishing pole before. At that time I was so bored, I was counting the lint balls on my sweater. OK, so there was one exciting part of the trip. It was when they had to put the worm on the hook. I enjoyed that because I didn’t have to touch the worm. So that night I boarded this party boat on a warm August summer evening and set out for the Long Island Sound. It wasn’t as bad as when I was a child because I had friends to talk to and good food to eat. The fellowship was sweet, and waiting for the fish was actually pleasant. I waited about an hour before I caught my one and only fish! It was a fluke! It was a great feeling, although I had to throw it back because it was too small to keep. All these years of hearing about people loving fishing and how they would wake up in the middle of the night to go out was foreign to me. That night fishing became real. The patience of waiting for a fish and then the thrill of the catch was all part of the joy of fishing. After that night, I found myself going fishing almost weekly.

One night I was fishing with a friend who was an experienced fisherman. He showed me a lot of things. There was actually a whole science involved. We first went on to the Internet to check for tide conditions and the time of when conditions were optimal. Then we selected the bait type depending on the kind of fish that was around during this time and in the place where we would be fishing. Then, when we got to the fishing location, there were certain spots where fish would congregate because that was where their food was. I gained incredible insight from going fishing with him. That night we caught over 4 fish—the biggest one was over 30 inches long!

A few years back, in Matthew 4:19, Jesus said to me, "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." That invitation has taken on a whole new dimension for me. I have learned that Jesus just didn’t want me to just tag along with him. He wants me to go fishing with him, fellowship, learn about the tide conditions, the types of fish, the timing, the patience and to show me the love of fishing. Jesus has provided me with the gifts and tools needed to “fish for the men that are lost.” The patience I need to be a good witness to the lost people, to be loving in all situations and to be sensitive to my surrounding to make an impact for the kingdom of God.

Being a “fisher of men” is more than just being out on the water randomly and putting some random bait on the hook. Jesus is the master fisherman that desires to teach us the “trade” of catching lost souls. Being a fish-
Albert Tse is studying part-time at the seminary while he is working full-time. In God’s time, he hopes to be in full-time ministry in the near future. Albert’s wife, Anna, is also graduated from ATS. They have three young sons.

"By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by either day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people" (Exodus 13:21-22).

When the Israelites came out of Egypt, the Lord had a route in mind for them to reach the Promised Land. Had He chosen to do so, He could have given it to them in full at the beginning of their journey. However, that would have negated the whole purpose of their sojourn in the wilderness, to learn to rely on Him for their continued existence. Instead, He chose to lead them personally in the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire. Similarly, He supplied them with manna to eat one day at a time. Israel failed this lesson of reliance by refusing to develop the gratefulness that was intended to accompany it. Similarly, God leads us one step at a time, but we rarely appreciate what He is teaching us by doing so.

My journey to reach Chinese in missions has been a surprise to me each step of the way, with each step less expected than the next. The first step was going to Nyack College, where the Lord made it very clear to me that I should go. My second day at Nyack I was declared as a pastoral ministry major. Missions was definitely an afterthought for me. I knew the Lord wanted me in full-time ministry, but I had no idea where or what kind. That would soon change. One of my Filipino friends invited me to Nyack’s Asian fellowship (Asian Nyackers Seeking Revival, or ANSR). Not having anything better to do, I went. What I found there were people who had a strong desire to worship God and who consistently encouraged one another to follow Him. Even though I am not Asian, the people there made me feel like I belonged, like I was part of the group. It opened my eyes to the wonders and challenges of
cross-cultural communication. As I became more involved with the group, even becoming part of the leadership team, I felt that the Lord was leading me away from conventional pastoral ministry into the murkier waters of cross-cultural missions.

I wasn’t precisely sure where the Lord had in mind for me, but I felt the strongest attachment to Japan, and began preparing accordingly. I had no plans whatsoever to work with Chinese people. In fact I saw missions in China as somewhat trendy and cliche. I certainly did not have the whole picture of God’s plan for my life. All I could do was trust him for the next step. Before too long, the surprises began to come one after another. I needed to take an extra class the first semester of my senior year, so on a whim I decided to learn Mandarin, which Nyack was offering. Around the same time, the veteran Alliance missionary Paul King came to speak in my Theology of Missions class, asking students to come with him on a short-term missions trip to teach English in China. Almost immediately the Holy Spirit informed me (he did NOT ask) that I would be going on that trip. All that I could do was obey and sign up. Over the course of that school year, learning Mandarin connected me with Chinese language and culture in a way I could hardly have imagined before. I began to question what God’s purpose was on sending me on this short-term mission trip, and prayed about it seriously. How did this fit with his greater calling on my life? My actual experience in China was unbelievable. I can hardly imagine anyone going to China for any length of time and not falling in love with the country and the people. By the time we left, my heart was set on going back. I still had only a vague idea of what God wanted me to do there, though. China is a big country, and its needs are wide and many. Moreover, the underground church there is famously experiencing revival. What did I have to offer? In many ways, my original plans (Japan) still made much more sense to me. What was God doing? As I began at ATS, I joined the Chinese Studies Program in part to help me answer this question. What could I offer China that it did not already have?

My time at ATS stretched me and helped me understand many of the things I now take for granted about cross-cultural ministry. I learned how Chinese people from one area may be very different from Chinese from another area, and how Chinese ways of thinking and planning are different from American ones. I am especially grateful to God for what He taught me through Dr. John Ng, so much of which I am currently making use of in ministry. However, I never quite expected the step which was to follow. My internship at Brooklyn Alliance Church took me by surprise. The most obvious reason was that it is a Cantonese church, and I only know Mandarin! It was hard for me to understand at first why the Lord had led me there. Eventually, however, I learned that it was the same lesson that the Israelites had to learn in the desert: to rely on God rather than relying on my own abilities. Since interning there and finishing my study at ATS, God has taken me one step further, as I am serving full-time as the English Congregation pastor at Brooklyn Alliance Church, living out what I’ve learned in seminary. The next steps for me now will be finding a missions organization and then going overseas long-term. Where will this adventure take me? I have no idea. The Lord leads us one step at a time, asking us to trust him for each new step without worrying about the future.
Pastors' Retreat 2009 was held from March 9-10. There were more than 35 pastors and co-workers attended the retreat.

The theme for this year was "21st Century Chinese Churches". Through workshop and discussions different issues and challenges the Chinese churches facing in the 21st Century were explored. Issues such as the trend and changes of the Mandarin ministry, the needs and challenges of ministry to American born Chinese, the challenges and issues the church faces in encountering the culture of today's world were discussed.

Co-workers treasured every moment and opportunity to learn from one another, to exchange insights, to share ministry experience, to pray and to support another.

Dr. John Ng is the speaker of a workshop on "Trend and Changes of the English Ministry in Chinese Churches". Dr. Ng is an Associate Professor of Pastoral Studies at ATS. Besides teaching, he also serves as the English pastor at New York Chinese Baptist Church. He is actively involved in raising and mentoring American born Chinese pastors and leaders.
New Ministry
James Yuan-Tai Chang (May 2005) has begun serving at Madison Chinese Christian Church, Madison in January.
Shanon Lee (May 2008) and his family will move to Oakland, California this summer. In July, Shanon will start his full-time ministry in Faith Chinese Alliance Church.
James Feng-Chin Len (1999) has been doing campus ministry in Taiwan since 2007. Right now James has ministry on three campuses: National Tsing Hua University, National Chiao Tung University and Chung Yuan Christian University.
James Lee-Shan Leu (May 2002) decided to respond to God's calling to go back to Taiwan after serving at the Chinese Church of Iowa City for six years. Both James and his wife, LiChin have burden for the needs of Taiwan for many years. They will join the Tainan Elim Ministries after going back this summer.
Keith Loo (May 2009) will do two years of externship at Queen Herald Church, NY after graduating from seminary.
Yen Chun Mao (May 2003) will conclude her six-year of ministry at Chinese Alliance Church of Westchester, NY in August. Yen-Chun will move to London and join the staff of COCM in London doing ministry among the Chinese students. It has been a passion for Yen-Chun to reach out to the Chinese students in Europe.
James Sun (1992) is now serving as the senior pastor at the Chinese Christian Church of Greater Washington, D.C..
Kitty Wong (May 2009) will continue serving at the Queens Heral Church, NY as an extern for the coming two years. The focus of Kitty's ministry is on Children.
Edmond Yeung (1998) is now serving as an intern chaplain at John Muir Hospital in Concord.

Ordination
Jun Ren (May 2007) will have his ordination ceremony held on June 6. He has been serving at the Living Stone Christian Church for three years.

Rockland Campus
Worship in the Chinese Churches
Instructor: Dr. John Ng
Date and Time: September 8 - December 15, Tuesday, 6:00pm - 9:00pm
Chinese Preaching 1
Instructor: Rev. Stanley Kwong
Date and Time: September 9 - December 16, Wednesday, 6:00pm - 9:00pm