Some time ago I read an interesting article by a man who was outstanding in the field of journalism. He was working for a firm which was wholly out of the line with that which he wanted to follow. He had started out to be a writer and had the usual experience of the neophyte writer of having his manuscripts returned with apologies. In a state of frustration, he now sought counsel. He looked down the pages of the telephone book and saw the name of a certain man. Without fully identifying the place or the full identity of the man, he went to the address and shortly he found himself ushered into a palatial office. He found that this was the president of one of the biggest concerns in the country. He was too frightened, and it was too late to run, so he was ushered in by the secretary to talk with this man. He explained rather haltingly what his frustrations were. (That is a word we over-use today. I do not know what frustration is, and I do not think the one who is frustrated knows what it is.)

The man listened to him about how he was not getting along in the company where he was now working and asked, “How much do you make, son?” When he named a modest income, the president said, “Well, I think we can do a little better than that.”

But the boy said, “I don't want to come to work for your company because that is still a step further away from where I want to go. I want to be a journalist.”

So this kindly man of great experience said to him, “Son, it may surprise you, what I am going to say. The thing you need to be a success is to have a few more failures. You haven't had enough failures. Now you go back and dig out these manuscripts and you turn a few of them into successes, then you are on your way to success. That is the trouble with you. You haven’t had enough failures.”

I have pondered that today, and as I come to you -- one of the greatest congregations of Latter-day Saint youth that has been assembled -- here at the Brigham Young University, I have been thinking of the tests to which the youth of the various generations of our day have been submitted.

Going back into the early days of the Church, we passed through a period of slander and misrepresentation, and we came through. It sort of drove us together because of the enemies from the outside. And we survived it.

We passed through a period of mobbing and driving, when lives were taken and blood was shed, and somehow the place of the martyr gave us strength.

We have passed through poverty, I suppose many of us here in this audience, if measured by today’s standards, would have been considered poor. We would have been on somebody’s relief program because of the meager sustenance which we had in our childhood days -- the passing down of the last generation’s clothes, the making over of our rich “city folks” castoffs, made over by a skillful mother for our use. Some of us remember that we were almost grown when we first had what we used to call a “boughten” suit of clothes. Some of you will remember. We have passed through poverty, and we have gained strength from the test of poverty.

Then we passed through an age of what we might call apostasy, or betrayal from the inside -- one of the severest tests through which we have passed.

Then we have gone through another -- or are going through -- a period of what we might might call sophistication. (I do not know what that word means either, but it generally means that there are so many confounded smart people that they are not willing to listen to the humble prophets of the Lord.) And we have suffered from that. And it is rather a severe test through which we are passing.

But today we are being tested and tried by another kind of test that [p.4] I might call the “test of gold” -- the test of plenty, affluence, ease -- more than perhaps the perhaps the youth of any generation have passed through, at least in this Church.

In this day of greatly expanding growth of college population and its tremendous costs, we are talking of federal aid to education as a way to ease the costs of so-called higher education. Men in high places are asking questions: Are our standards in college education too low? Is there a high percentage of college students who are attending college who really want to excel, or are they
attending college just because it is the popular thing to do, and they are really not prepared to put their hearts into it? Are we making college education too easy for them? Are we really expecting the kind of sacrifice that makes for strength as a result of this education? Now those are some soul-searching questions, but you can be sure that men in high station who are thinkers are asking those very questions, and about us, and we who sit in such places must one time ask similar questions.

With that in mind then, this may sound to you to be a strange dissertation upon a few matters that might be said to be negative rather than positive in their approach. I shall take the following quotation as something of a text, and then you will know what I started out to try to say, if I depart largely therefrom. That is usually what a text is for, anyway.

Shakespeare, you remember, ended one of his great expressions: “Sweet are the uses of adversity...” And all through my life, since I was forced to memorize it to pass for, anyway.

Sweet are the uses of adversity;
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous
Wears yet a precious Jewel in his head:
And this our life exempt from public haunt
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones and good in every thing.
(As You Like It, II, i, 12-17.)

While I was back East this last month, I sat in with groups of businessmen in two of the great institutions back there. There were three things that had excited these business leaders and had drawn their attention to the Church. The first was the possibility of George Romney as a political luminary -- the American Motors president and the president of our Detroit Stake. There was a lot of interest and favorable press about George Romney.

Then there was the announcement of a new...they call it a skyscraper to be built by the Church. Some thought we were going into the hotel business when they saw the picture and the announcement of a proposed big skyscraper up in Manhattan.

The third thing was the phenomenal successes of the BYU College Bowl team. As I sat around a luncheon table with some of these men who had watched the performances of our students on the College Bowl, they said, “My, it is just wonderful, those students! What a great studentbody you must have to have such representatives.” And I made a remark then that caused them to wonder and it may cause you to wonder a little. I said, “Probably it will be the best thing for the BYU participants, themselves, if they lose one of these battles of wits.” That may have sounded like disloyalty, but I am not sure but that I was wholly right. What probably they needed more than anything else were a few more failures to make them the champions that they hoped one day to be heralded.

I was to conference down in Richfield, Utah, some years ago. Early on Sunday morning I got a call from an anxious mother.

She said, “This may not sound important to you, but my son is playing on the Richfield High School basketball team. They are all religious boys. They are members of the Church and they have been very devoted. My son had to them, ‘Now boys, let’s be faithful in our attendance at Sunday School and sacrament meeting and priesthood meeting. Let’s pay our tithing. Let’s have our prayers so that we can win the basketball league.’ And so they went out and they had been successful. But last night, Saturday night, they lost to the tail-enders of the league. They were the champions and they lost to the lowest ones on the totem pole. And then these boys said as they walked off the court, ‘Well, where did all that church going and praying get us anyway?’

“No,” she said, “Brother Lee, I wish you could say something because my son is kind of on the spot. I wish you would say something.”

Well, the business of the morning sessions precluded any thinking about what I might say, if I did say anything, until I came into the morning general session of conference and looked down at the first row. Here was the mother and the entire basketball team sitting right down in front of me. It, was as much as to say, “Well, here we are. Now what are you going to say about it? What are you going to do about it?”

Well, with a bit of guidance and a bit of inspiration, I sought to say something the like of which I may say today, that probably their losses were some of the greatest gains they could have received from their basketball experience, and that out of failure -- or what seemed to be failure -- had come, in the period of various ages of the world, the greatest of all the successes. Now it is about that for a few moments that I should like to address myself.

One of the greatest business leaders in America today, James F. Oates of the Equitable Life, said this about factors which he said were necessary to develop us into real eminence in any field. He said:

Whatever may be the nature of our work, or the character of our own vocational activity, eminence always involves the following: [And then he named four factors,
and I want you to mark them.]

1. You must have the determination to excel.

2. You must have the willingness [And I want you to mark this.] to pay the price, to study, to live through disappointments with optimism, and to accept the sacrifices necessary to succeed. [Now, do you get the significance of that?]

3. You must have the steadfast pursuit of purpose, doing the work day after day, week after week, yes, year after year, whether you feel like doing it or not.

4. You must have pride and faith in the virtue of your calling. [That is to say, spiritual motivation.] (Address before the YMCA at Los Angeles, California, April 15, 1960.)

Great scientists best verify the necessity for the process by which series of failures are ultimately turned into successes. Let me read to you from a statement made by Dr. Edmund D. Starbuck -- who was a summer school lecturer on this campus in 1929. He said something that I want you to listen to, and then an accompanying statement from Dr. Albert Einstein:

The scientist studies his problem, saturates his mind with it, puzzles over it, dreams about it, but seems to find progress impossible, blocked as it were by a black impenetrable wall. And then at last and suddenly as if out of the nowhere there comes a flash of light, the answer to his quest. His mind is now illumined by a great discovery. The professor was positive that no great discovery had ever been made by pure reasoning. Reason would lead to the borderline of the unknown, but could not tell what was within. (Deseret News, November 22, 1930.)

Dr. Einstein said this:

“After all, the work of a researching scientist germinates upon the soul of imagination or of vision. When I think and reflect how my discoveries originated and took form, a hundred times you run, as it were, with your head against the wall [Now that meant a hundred failures or more.] in order to lay your hands upon and define and fit into a system what, from a merely indefinable premonition, you sense in vain.

“And then suddenly, perhaps like a stroke of lightning, the salient thought will come to you and the indescribably laborious task of building up and expanding the system can begin. The process is not different by which the artist arrives at his conceptions. Real faith, either to scientist or a businessman or a minister of religion, involves the problem and struggle of searching.” (Deseret News, November 22, 1930.)

Dr. Victor F. Hess, 1936 Nobel physics prize winner, who was the discoverer of cosmic radiation, said this:

“Real faith for a scientist, as for anyone else, is often a matter of bitter struggle. The victory must be won or the gift must be discovered by each one in his own soul. It oftentimes takes the personal experience of grave danger of death to bring conviction and to prepare the way for faith in a Divine Providence. [I want you to remember that.] What is certain is that, when faith comes, there follows a great serenity of soul and a deep peace in the human heart.” (“The Faith of Great Scientists,” collection of faith articles from The American Weekly.)

Dr. Alfred C. Lane of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences said this:

“I believe we should strive for faith that keeps one calm and brave in the face of dangers met in the path of duty. Such a faith should be like that which a soldier has in a commander in which he has perfect confidence to bring him through. I believe that faith keeps one true in the dark and humble in the spotlight. But most important, I believe that faith works, brings hopes to fruition, and ideals to reality. Without faith man is a cold creature lost in the world of human progress. He has nothing to live for. He fears death. Fear distorts his outlook. He becomes but a human shell.” (“The Faith of Great Scientists.”)

Some of the greatest religious experiences have come out of some of the most terrifying experiences. Paul puts this in summary, you remember, when he said of the Master:

“Though he were a Son [meaning the Son of God], yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; [And then he added] “And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all of them that obeyed him;” (Hebrews 5:8-9.)

He became the Savior of Mankind through suffering, in other words.

Paul was probably remembering acutely his own spiritual victory after seeming defeat. He had set himself to a course of trying to destroy that sect called Christianity when suddenly a blinding flash of light knocked him to the ground and a voice spoke and said,

“...Saul, Saul why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Thou shalt go to one Ananias in the city of Damascus [The very city that Paul had letters to continue his persecutions.] -- Thou shalt go to Ananias and he shall tell thee what thou shalt do. That was the lowest
degradation and humility to which Paul could be submitted. (See Acts 9:9-19.)

The Master made reference to his own adversities, when Joseph Smith in one of the lowest depths of his suffering said:

“O God, where art thou?...

“How long shall thy hand be stayed, and thine eye, yea thy pure eye, behold from the eternal heavens the wrongs of thy people and of thy servants, and thine ear be penetrated with their cries?

“Let thine anger be kindled against our enemies; and in the fury of thine heart, with thy sword avenge us of our wrongs. (D&C 121:1-3, 5.)

“And the Lord, as though he had taken a frightened child in his arms, said,

“My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment;

“And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high; thou shalt triumph over all thy foes.” (D&C 121:7-8.)

And then He said:

“And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.” (D&C 122:7.)

I guess it would be difficult in the midst of persecution and suffering to wonder what good is going to come out of all this kind of trial and suffering.

In the terrifying experience of the Master on the Mount of Temptation, after those forty days of fasting and those terrifying temptations of Satan, the scriptures say, “angels came and ministered unto him.” (Matthew 4:11.)

The first missionaries, you remember, who went to England were submitted to a terrifying experience. Just when the greatest harvest of this dispensation was about to be made, the four missionaries there in their sleeping quarters in Preston, England, witnessed for an hour and a half a marching parade of evil-looking devils who came, possessing every form and feature of men in the flesh, angry and desperate, cursing, profaning, threatening. The four missionaries told of the perspiration that evidenced many contests he had had with the evil one and said, “The nearer a person approaches the Lord, the greater will be manifested by the adversary to prevent the accomplishment of his purpose.” (Life of Heber C. Kimball, pp. 131-132.)

John Taylor, in connection with this, said, “I heard the Prophet Joseph Smith say to the Twelve, ‘You will have all kinds of troubles and trials to pass through. And it is quite as necessary for you to be tried, even as Abraham and other men of God.’ And said he, ‘God will feel after you and he will take hold of you and wrench your very heart strings. And if you cannot stand it, you will not be fit for an inheritance in the Celestial Kingdom of God.’” (John Taylor, Journal of Discourses, Vol. 24, p. 197.)

As I have listened to every member of the Twelve that has come in since I became a member of that body, each has repeated my own experience. Within a week after my installation as a member of the Twelve, I sat in a social gathering and listened to all who had preceded me who were then living relate their experiences in being called to be apostles and all of them were also telling my story. It was put in language by one of the brethren who said, “One thing that I have learned since I came into the Council of the Twelve, and that is that there is a devil.” That may surprise you, but it verifies the very point that is made here.

We sing “How I would like to have been there when Jesus put out his hands and took the little children into his arms. How I would like to have been there when He stood on the Mount of Olives,” and so on. (See: “I Think When I Read that Sweet Story of Old.”) And there are those who have said, “How I would like to have been there to have defended the Prophet Joseph when he was going through his trials.” To these who thus say, President Kimball said:

There are many within hearing who had often wished that they could have been associated with the Prophet. You imagine that you would have stood by him when persecution raged, and he was assailed by foes from within and without. You would have defended him and delighted to have shown your integrity in the days of mobs and traitors. Let me say to you that many of you will see the time when you will have all the trouble and trials and
persecution that you can stand and plenty of opportunities to show that you are true to God and to his work.

The Church has before it many close places through which it will have to pass before the work of God is crowned with victory. To meet the difficulties that are coming, it will be necessary for you to have a knowledge of the truth of this work for yourselves. The difficulties will be of such a character that the man or woman who does not possess this personal knowledge or witness, will fall.

If you have not got the testimony, live right and call upon the Lord, and cease not until you obtain it. If you do not, you will not stand. Remember these things, for many of you will live to see them fulfilled. The time will come when no man or woman will be able to stand on borrowed light. Each of you will have to be guided with the light within himself. If you do not have it, how can you stand? Do you believe that? (Life of Heber C. Kimball, pp. 449-450.)

That is adversity, the meeting with and the solving and the being up against the things of the opposition.

President J. Reuben Clark used to relate a mythical story of a wise man who went to visit King Solomon. After they had visited for several days and this wise man was about to depart, King Solomon said, “Now surely you are not going to leave without leaving with me some gem of thought to ponder after you are gone.”

“Oh,” said the man, “What can I say to you, the wisest man in all the world?”

But King Solomon pressed him and finally this man said, “Well, I might give you this to ponder: When everything is black and foreboding, and dangers are all round about you, retire to your secret chamber and thank God that this one day will pass. And when the sun is shining, and everything is rosy and everything is lovely and going all right, then again do not forget to retire to your private chamber and again say, ‘Thank God that this too will one day pass.’”

Isn’t that strange? To pray for adversity, to pray for struggle -- to pray for adversity that you might be able to rise above it and be worthy of the place you have?

Let me close by reading you two statements that must be familiar to you students of the Book of Mormon. Alma came upon a group of people who were mourning because they had been thrust out of their synagogues because their clothing was not good enough. And he said to them:

“I say unto you, it is well that ye are cast out of your synagogues, that ye may be humble, and that ye may learn wisdom; for it is necessary that ye should learn wisdom; for it is because that ye are cast out, that ye are despised of your brethren because of your exceeding poverty, that ye are brought to a lowliness of heart; for ye are necessarily brought to be humble.

“And now, because ye are compelled to be humble blessed are ye; for a man sometimes, if he is compelled to be humble, seeketh repentance; and now surely, whosoever repenteth shall find mercy; and he that findeth mercy and endureth to the end the same shall be saved. (Alma 32:12-13.)

And then you will remember in Helaman:

“And thus we can behold how false, and also the unsteadiness of the hearts of the children of men; yea, we can see that the Lord in his great infinite goodness doth bless and prosper those who put their trust in him.

“Yea, and we may see at the very time when he doth prosper his people, yea, in the increase of their fields, their flocks, and their herds, and in gold, and in silver, and in all manner of precious things of every kind and art; sparing their lives, and delivering them out of the hands of their enemies; softening the hearts of their enemies that they should not declare wars against them; yea, and in fine, doing all things for the welfare and happiness of his people; yea, then is the time that they do harden their hearts, and do forget the Lord their God, and do trample under their feet the Holy One -- yea, and this because of their ease, and their exceedingly great prosperity.

“And thus we see that except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror, and with famine and with all manner of pestilence, they will not remember him. [Isn’t that sad?]

“O how foolish, and how vain, and how evil, and devilish, and how quick to do iniquity, and how slow to do good, are the children of men; yea, how quick to hearken unto the words of the evil one, and to set their hearts upon the vain things of the world!

“Yea, how quick to be lifted up in pride; yea, how quick to boast, and do all manner of that which is iniquity; and how slow are they to remember the Lord their God, and to give ear unto his counsels, yea, how slow to walk in wisdom’s path!” (Helaman 12:1-5.)

Will you remember what I read from Dr. Lane, “Faith is that which keeps you true in the dark and humble in the spotlight.”

The Master said:

“Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

“Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” (Matthew
5:11-12.)

“[But] woe unto you, when all men shall speak well
of you for so did their fathers to the false prophets.”
(Luke 6:26.)

James Russell Lowell caught the sentiment that I
should like you to carry away from this brief dissertation
in his poem “Present Crisis.” In one verse he says:

Then to side with Truth is noble when we share her
wretched crust

Ere her cause bring fame and profit, and ‘tis
prosperous to be just;

Then it is the brave man chooses, while the coward
stands aside,

Doubting in his abject spirit, till his Lord is crucified,

And the multitude make virtue of the faith they had
denied.

You Latter-day Saint youth, youth of the noble
birthright, you whose parents have passed through the
rigors of trial and testing, I ask you to consider now the
trials through which you are passing today -- you call it
ease and luxury and perhaps too easy ways to learning
and education. May you not forget that in our day yours
may be the most severe test of those of any age. God grant
that we will not fall and that we will so have the faith that
we can keep true when we are in the dark and when we
are in the spotlight, that we shall not forget to be humble,
for which I pray humbly in the name of the Lord Jesus
Christ. Amen.