

# Spiritual Eclipse

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Don't let life's distractions eclipse heaven's light.

On August 21 of this year, two rare events occurred that captured the attention of people around the world. The first was the 90th birthday celebration of our beloved prophet, President Thomas S. Monson. At the time, I was on assignment in the Pacific Area and was thrilled that the Saints of Australia, Vanuatu, New Zealand, and French Polynesia were not only aware of his personal milestone, but they also rejoiced in celebrating it. I felt fortunate to share in their warm expressions of faith and love for this great man. What an inspiration it is to see the connection Latter-day Saints share with their prophet.

Of course, President Monson, mindful of those desiring to wish him happy birthday, described an ideal birthday gift: "Find someone who is having a hard time or is ill or lonely and do something for them. That's all I would ask."<sup>1</sup> We love and sustain you, President Monson.

### Solar Eclipse

The other rare and heavenly event occurring on the same day and captivating millions worldwide was a total solar eclipse. This was the first time such an eclipse had marched across the entire United States in 99 years.<sup>2</sup> Have you ever seen a solar eclipse? Perhaps I could describe this in greater detail.

A total solar eclipse occurs when the moon moves between the earth and the sun, almost completely blocking any light from the sun's surface.<sup>3</sup> The fact that this can happen is a marvel to me. If you imagine the sun as the size of a common bicycle tire, the moon in comparison would scarcely be the size of a small pebble.

How is it possible that the very source of our warmth, light, and life could be so greatly obscured by something comparatively insignificant in size?

Although the sun is 400 times larger than the moon, it is also 400 times farther away from the earth.<sup>4</sup> From earth's perspective, this geometry makes the sun and moon appear to be the same size. When the two are aligned just right, the moon seems to obscure the entire sun. Friends and family of mine who were in the zone of total eclipse described how light was replaced by darkness, the stars appeared, and birds

quit singing. The air became chilly, as temperatures in an eclipse can decrease by more than 20 degrees Fahrenheit (11 degrees Celsius).<sup>5</sup>

They described a sense of awe, astonishment, and even anxiety, knowing an eclipse brings certain hazards. However, they all exercised care to prevent permanent eye damage or “eclipse blindness” during the eclipse event. Safety was made possible because they wore glasses equipped with special filtered lenses that protected their eyes from any potential harm.

## The Analogy

In the same manner that the very small moon can block the magnificent sun, extinguishing its light and warmth, a *spiritual* eclipse can occur when we allow minor and troublesome obstructions—those we face in our daily lives—to get so close that they block out the magnitude, brightness, and warmth of the light of Jesus Christ and His gospel.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell took this analogy even further when he stated: “Even something as small as a man’s thumb, when held very near the eye, can blind him to the very large sun. Yet the sun is still there. Blindness is brought upon the man by himself. When we draw other things too close, placing them first, we obscure our vision of heaven.”<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, none of us wants to purposefully obscure our vision of heaven or allow a spiritual eclipse to occur in our lives. Let me share some thoughts that may assist us in preventing spiritual eclipse from causing us permanent spiritual damage.

## Gospel Glasses: Maintain a Gospel Perspective

Do you recall my description of special eyewear used to protect those viewing a solar eclipse from eye damage or even eclipse blindness? Looking at a spiritual eclipse through the protecting and softening lens of the Spirit provides a gospel perspective, thus protecting us from spiritual blindness.

Let’s consider some examples. With the words of the prophets in our hearts and the Holy Spirit as our counselor, we can gaze at partially blocked heavenly light through “gospel glasses,” avoiding the harm of a spiritual eclipse.

So how do we put on gospel glasses? Here are some examples: Our gospel glasses inform us that the Lord desires that we partake of the sacrament each week and that He desires that we study the scriptures and have daily prayer. They also inform us that Satan will tempt us not to. We know that his agenda seeks to take away our agency through distractions and worldly temptations. Even in Job’s day, perhaps there were

some experiencing a spiritual eclipse, described as: "They meet with darkness in the daytime, and grope in the noonday as in the night."<sup>7</sup>

Brothers and sisters, when I speak of seeing through gospel glasses, please know that I am not suggesting that we do not acknowledge or discuss the challenges we face or that we walk blissfully ignorant of the traps and evils the enemy has placed before us. I am not speaking of wearing blinders—but just the opposite. I am suggesting that we look at challenges through the lens of the gospel. Elder Dallin H. Oaks observed that "perspective is the ability to see all relevant information in a meaningful relationship."<sup>8</sup> A gospel perspective expands our sight to an eternal view.

When you put on gospel glasses, you find enhanced perspective, focus, and vision in the way you think about your priorities, your problems, your temptations, and even your mistakes. You will see brighter light that you could not see without them.

Ironically, it is not only the negative that can cause spiritual eclipse in our lives. Often, admirable or positive endeavors to which we dedicate ourselves can be drawn so close that they blot out gospel light and bring darkness. These dangers or distractions could include education and prosperity, power and influence, ambition, even talents and gifts.

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf has taught that "any virtue when taken to an extreme can become a vice. ... There comes a point where milestones can become millstones and ambitions, albatrosses around our necks."<sup>9</sup>

Let me share in greater detail examples that could become catalysts for avoiding our own spiritual eclipses.

## Social Media

A few months ago I spoke at BYU Women's Conference.<sup>10</sup> I described how technology, including social media, facilitates spreading "the knowledge of a Savior ... throughout every nation, kindred, tongue, and people."<sup>11</sup> These technologies include Church websites like LDS.org and Mormon.org; mobile apps such as Gospel Library, Mormon Channel, LDS Tools, and Family Tree; and social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Pinterest. These modalities have generated hundreds of millions of likes, shares, views, retweets, and pins and have become very effective and efficient in sharing the gospel with family, friends, and associates.

All of the virtues and appropriate use of these technologies notwithstanding, there are risks associated with them that, when drawn too close, can put us in a spiritual eclipse and potentially block the brightness and warmth of the gospel.

The use of social media, mobile apps, and games can be inordinately time-consuming and can reduce face-to-face interaction. This loss of personal conversation can affect

marriages, take the place of valuable spiritual practices, and stifle the development of social skills, especially among youth.

Two additional risks related to social media are idealized reality and debilitating comparisons.

Many (if not most) of the pictures posted on social media tend to portray life at its very best—often unrealistically. We have all seen beautiful images of home decor, wonderful vacation spots, smiling selfies, elaborate food preparation, and seemingly unattainable body images.

Here, for example, is an image that you might see on someone's social media account. However, it doesn't quite capture the *full* picture of what is *actually* going on in real life.

Comparing our own seemingly average existence with others' well-edited, perfectly crafted lives as represented on social media may leave us with feelings of discouragement, envy, and even failure.

One person who has shared numerous posts of her own said, perhaps only partly in jest, "What's the point of being happy if you're not going to post it?"<sup>12</sup>

As Sister Bonnie L. Oscarson reminded us this morning, success in life doesn't come down to how many likes we get or how many social media friends or followers we have. It does, however, have something to do with meaningfully connecting with others and adding light to their lives.

Hopefully, we can learn to be more real, find more humor, and experience less discouragement when confronted with images that may portray idealized reality and that too often lead to debilitating comparisons.

Comparison apparently is not just a sign of our times but was in times past as well. The Apostle Paul warned the people of his day that "they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise."<sup>13</sup>

With so many appropriate and inspired uses of technology, let us use it to teach, inspire, and lift ourselves and to encourage others to become their finest—rather than to portray our idealized virtual selves. Let us also teach and demonstrate the righteous use of technology to the rising generation and warn against the associated hazards and destructive use of it. Viewing social media through the lens of the gospel can prevent it from becoming a spiritual eclipse in our lives.

## Pride

Let's now address the age-old stumbling block of pride. Pride is the opposite of humility, which is a "willingness to submit to the will of the Lord."<sup>14</sup> When prideful, we tend to take honor to ourselves rather than giving it to others, including the Lord.

Pride is often competitive; it is a tendency to seek to obtain more and presume we are better than others. Pride often results in feelings of anger and hatred; it causes one to hold grudges or to withhold forgiveness. Pride, however, can be swallowed in the Christlike attribute of humility.

Relationships, even with close family and loved ones, *especially* with close family and loved ones—even between husbands and wives—are fostered in humility and are stymied by pride.

Many years ago an executive of a large retailer called me to talk about his company, which was being bought out by one of its competitors. He and numerous other headquarters personnel were extremely anxious that they might lose their jobs. Knowing that I was well acquainted with senior management of the acquiring company, he asked if I would be willing to both introduce him and give a strong reference on his behalf, even to arrange a meeting for him. He then concluded with the following statement: "You know what they say? 'The meek shall perish!'"

I understood his comment was more than likely intended as humor. I got the joke. But there was an important principle that I felt might ultimately be of use to him. I replied, "Actually, that isn't what they say. In fact, it is just the opposite. 'The meek ... shall inherit the earth'<sup>15</sup> is what they say."

In my experience in the Church as well as throughout my professional career, some of the greatest, most effective people I have known have been among the most meek and humble.

Humility and meekness fit hand in glove. May we remember that "none is acceptable before God, save the meek and lowly in heart."<sup>16</sup>

I pray that we will strive to avoid the spiritual eclipse of pride by embracing the virtue of humility.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, a solar eclipse is indeed a remarkable phenomenon of nature during which the beauty, warmth, and light of the sun can be completely covered by a comparatively insignificant object, causing darkness and chill.

A similar phenomenon can be replicated in a spiritual sense, when otherwise small and insignificant matters are drawn too close and block the beauty, warmth, and heavenly light of the gospel of Jesus Christ, replacing it with cold darkness.

Eyewear designed to protect the sight of those in the zone of a total solar eclipse can prevent permanent damage and even blindness.<sup>17</sup> Gospel glasses comprised of a knowledge and testimony of gospel principles and ordinances provide a gospel

perspective that can similarly provide greater spiritual protection and clarity for someone exposed to the hazards of a spiritual eclipse.

If you discover anything that seems to be blocking the light and joy of the gospel in *your* life, I invite you to place it in a gospel perspective. Look through a gospel lens and be vigilant not to allow insignificant and inconsequential matters in life to obscure your eternal view of the great plan of happiness. In short, don't let life's distractions eclipse heaven's light.

## Testimony

I bear testimony that no matter the obstruction that may block our vision of gospel light, the light is still there. That source of warmth, truth, and brightness is the gospel of Jesus Christ. I bear testimony of a loving Heavenly Father; of His Son, Jesus Christ; and of the Son's role as our Savior and Redeemer. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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