



MAKING Temple Marriage A PRIORITY

By Vitaly and Ekaterina Shmakov

Vitaly: When I had been home from my mission for a few months, I was asked to be a counselor at a local youth conference. Steven C. Smith, president of the Russia Novosibirsk Mission, called me into his office. I anticipated a new calling or a formal interview of some kind. Instead, President Smith told me about someone he wanted me to meet—a young woman who had recently completed her mission and returned home to another part of Russia but who would be in town for the conference.

I had never seen Katya before, but once I arrived at the conference, I introduced myself, and we casually chatted for a few minutes. Later that night I asked Katya for a dance. The next day I asked her for another.

Katya: Growing up, I didn't know many young, single priesthood holders, but I always hoped that the Lord would provide a worthy young man for me to marry. I had no idea when or how we would meet, but I had confidence in the Lord and His promises.

After my mission, I was invited to help chaperone a youth conference. When I saw Vitaly at the conference, I was immediately interested in getting to know him. We spent the most wonderful and unforgettable three days together at the conference.

I felt a strong prompting early on that Vitaly was the man I was to marry. Of course, not everyone will experience this kind of feeling so early in a courtship. So how do we know we are heading in the right direction? I learned on my mission to recognize the Spirit and to follow His direction without any doubts. So when I felt promptings that I needed to get to know Vitaly, I decided to follow them.

I know that the Spirit will guide all of us if we seek His companionship. It's important that we not compare our own path to that of others—the Spirit may not guide all of us in exactly the same manner—but if we are following the Spirit, we can have confidence that our path is right for us.

Overcoming Obstacles

Vitaly: During those three days, I realized I had found someone special. I was disappointed when the conference ended and Katya and I had to part. Luckily, though, there was a young single adult conference the next month.

I immediately started looking forward to it.

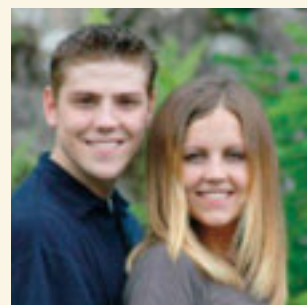
That conference was as great as I had hoped. Katya and I spent a lot of time really getting to know each other. As the event ended, we exchanged phone numbers and went back to our respective cities.

During the following weeks we kept in touch mostly by phone calls and text messages. (I think in less than a month I learned to text on my cell phone faster than most people can type on a laptop!)

Katya lived in Yekaterinburg, which is 11 hours away by train from where I lived in

Omsk, Siberia. Nevertheless, we both desperately wanted to see each other again. We started to make regular trips on the weekends. I would go to see her one weekend, and a few weeks later, she would come visit me. When I visited Katya, I stayed with mutual friends in her town, and when she visited me, she stayed with mutual friends who lived in my town. We often spent time with these

Vitaly and Ekaterina (Katya) Shmakov were born in Omsk, Russia, and Yekaterinburg, Russia, respectively. Both joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in their teens, and both served missions—Vitaly in the Czech Prague Mission and Katya in the Russia Novosibirsk Mission. They say their conversions opened their minds to the possibilities of happy, confident, fulfilling lives, and their missions cemented their desires to create gospel-centered homes, starting with temple marriage. This is their story.



friends from church during our visits.

Katya: Eleven hours may seem like a long commute, but for Russia, that's really just a short walk! Because of the distance, our dates were not as frequent as we would have liked. We could get together only once every few weeks and spend two or three days together before one of us returned home. Often, it felt like we needed a lot more time than that, and parting was always difficult. But because we had to make such an effort to see each other, we appreciated every minute we spent together. As our



relationship progressed, we began to look forward to a time when we would not have to say good-bye.

Our dates were very interesting and diverse: we rode bicycles and horses, visited museums, read the scriptures, cooked, walked in the parks (we even danced in one of them), and went to an orphanage to serve and play with the children.

Every time we met, we did something new, so we had a lot of fun. I appreciated how inventive Vitaly was in planning our dates.

Living the Lord's Way

Vitaly: In Russia, as in many places, it is the norm for people to live together before marrying. After I proposed to Katya, some of my friends asked me how I could possibly marry her without knowing beforehand if we were personally compatible. They reasoned, as many also did with Katya, that the only way to really know whether she was right for me was to live with her for an extended period of time.

I told them that there is no need to live with a person to get to know him or her. I also tried to explain to my friends in a way that they could understand that I had prayed and received an answer that I should marry Katya. Having prayed about my decision, I had no fears about married life. I was excited and felt like a whole new life was unfolding before me. No one ever opposed or criticized me for taking this stand. In fact, they supported me in my decision.

Katya: When Vitaly proposed, my parents tried to talk me out of getting married. They thought it was too soon for us to be engaged and that I needed to know Vitaly better than I did. My boss at work told me the same thing and added, "You need to live together before you make a choice like that."

I'm sad that people feel that way about marriage and family. I don't think they understand how happy couples can be when they are married and sealed in the temple. The great love and happiness Vitaly and I felt at our marriage were made even stronger by the knowledge that we are sealed for eternity.

Vitaly: Katya and I were married in Omsk on February 25, 2006. (The laws of Russia require a civil marriage prior to a temple sealing, as many countries do.) The next morning we set off on a trip to the Stockholm Sweden Temple. We boarded an airplane in Omsk and flew three



KEEP AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE

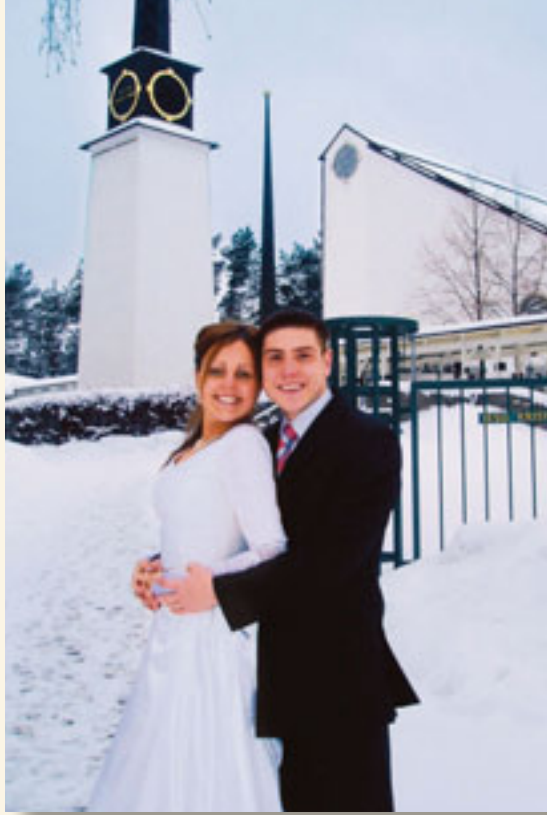
Maintain an eternal perspective. Let there be a temple marriage in your future. There is no scene so sweet, no time so sacred as that very special day of your marriage. Then and there you glimpse celestial joy. Be alert; do not permit temptation to rob you of this blessing."

President Thomas S. Monson, "Be Thou an Example," *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2005, 113.

The activities he planned helped us really get to know each other.

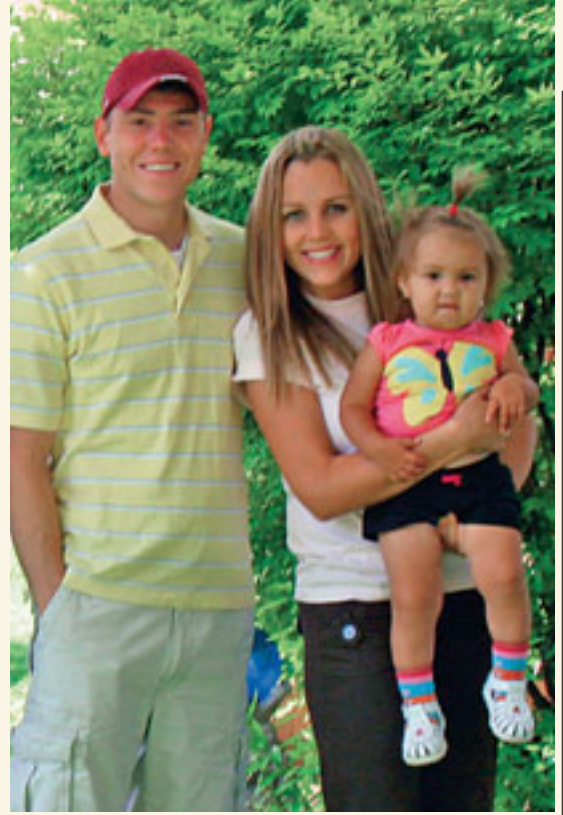
Vitaly: Because I was a student, I couldn't really afford many amusing things. I spent most of my money traveling to see Katya and paying my phone bill. But having a limited budget didn't mean that our dating had to be uninteresting or unproductive. In fact, some of our best dates didn't cost a single penny.

It may sound silly, but I wanted to see how Katya would act around children, so we went to an orphanage. It was like that with many of our dates; we really tried to learn as much about each other as we could.



Left: The Shmakovs on their sealing day in 2006; their trip to the Stockholm Sweden Temple took about 30 hours.

Right: Today, the Shmakovs have a young daughter. Katya says, “I want her to marry in the temple someday, and the best support we could offer her is to be loving companions and parents.”



hours to Moscow, where we spent the rest of the day. Then we took an overnight train to Saint Petersburg. Once there we got on a bus with other Latter-day Saints and traveled for eight hours to Helsinki, Finland. The last leg of our journey was an 11-hour ferry ride to Stockholm.

Finally, we had reached the temple.

For some, such a long trip may seem like a challenge, but in many ways, our trip across Europe made a great honeymoon.

The day of our sealing, March 1, 2006, was a great day—a day of peace and assurance. I knew that the person whose hand I was holding was the one I'd share eternity with. This thought alone filled me with great joy and gratitude to Heavenly Father for trusting me with His daughter for my wife. I felt closer to Him than ever before.

Seeking Christlike Characteristics

Katya: Now Vitaly and I have a young daughter. She is wonderful. I want her to marry in the temple someday, and the best support we could offer her is to be loving companions and parents.

I hope that she is able to find a worthy priesthood holder who has many Christlike attributes. It was seeing those kinds of attributes in Vitaly that helped me know I could marry him.

What attracted me to Vitaly? Of course, he is handsome and smart, and he knows how to court a woman. But these were not the main criteria. He had what I like to call “eyes of a disciple of Christ.” I sensed a light in him. He is a righteous priesthood holder.

Vitaly: Of course, it's great to be married to someone you're attracted to. But when our focus is solely on physical characteristics, we inevitably miss the most important characteristics—personality, spirituality, and other qualities that really matter in an enduring marriage.

I realize it may be a challenge for some young adults to find a spouse in the Church simply because there are not many Latter-day Saints where they live. I empathize with them. Nevertheless, I know that no matter what circumstances we are in, if we do our part and prepare ourselves to be sealed in the temple, Heavenly Father can provide a way. ■