

Our Plan to Beat the Odds

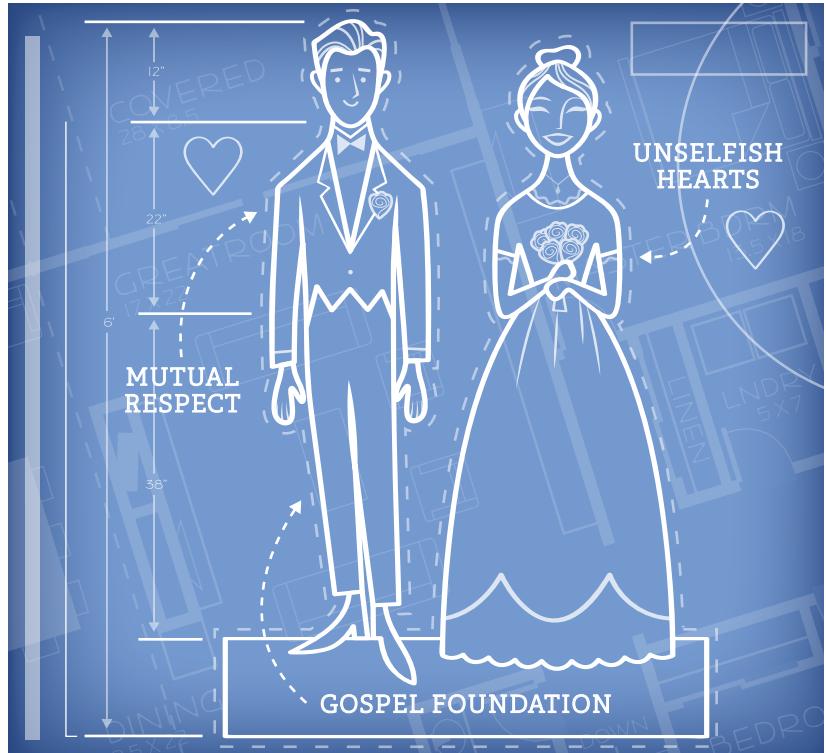
We knew our marriage could work despite our parents' divorces.

By Matthew Flitton

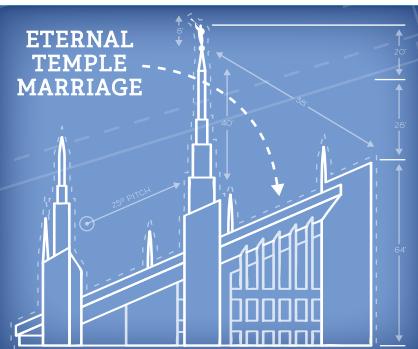
Church Magazines

The odds seemed against our marriage from the start. My parents divorced when I was four. By the time I left for my mission, my parents had gone through three more marriages. One of those marriages lasted only seven months. My wife's parents divorced when she was 13. According to statistics, we were three times more likely to divorce than people raised in intact homes.¹

Those of us who have experienced this can wonder if marriage is a good idea. After all, we've suffered the effects of divorce. We've had siblings, grandparents, and other relatives who have entered and exited our lives like waves on a seashore. We've seen what divorce can do to everyone involved. Why would we enter this relationship that's supposed to last for eternity, when we've seen the bitter ends of these kinds of relationships in a few short years?



Despite all that, I wasn't afraid of marriage. I had watched the relationships falling apart as a youth, but I knew that if I could find a better model, I could make marriage work. Since all of them lacked a firm gospel foundation, I thought that might be the missing ingredient.



When Nephi was told to build a ship, the Lord told him, "Thou shalt construct a ship, after the manner which I shall show thee" (1 Nephi 17:8). Nephi did and says it was not built "after the manner of men" but "after the manner which the Lord had shown unto me" (1 Nephi 18:2). By building your future marriage on gospel principles—by building them in the manner the Lord has shown—you can have a successful relationship regardless of your background.

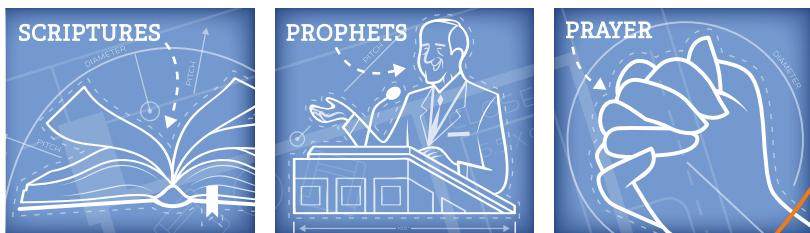
As we moved forward in our relationship, Annie (my wife) and I agreed on a few things. The first was that there was no easy escape clause in our marriage. Divorce wasn't an option unless infidelity or abuse were involved. We agreed that everything else could be worked out. We also recognized that the behavior patterns we had seen in our homes growing up didn't work. We needed a better way: that way is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Because Annie and I had both previously been endowed, temple attendance was an important part of our courtship. We went regularly and enjoyed the Spirit together. We started studying the Book of Mormon together. This formed a good basis for our discussions about what we wanted to create in a marriage.

The same month that my wife and I got engaged, the Church released the proclamation on the family, which counsels, "Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities."²

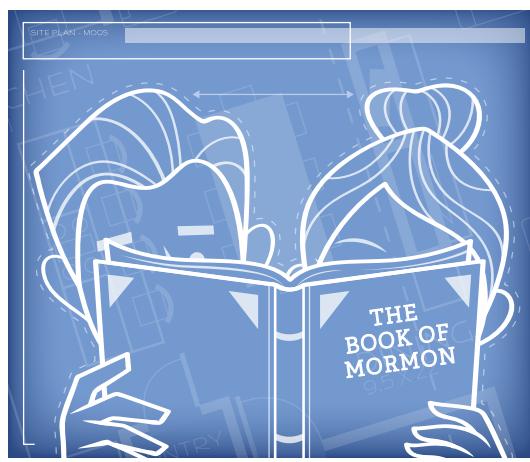
Similarly, President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) in speaking of the increase in divorces throughout the world, identified one major reason: "It appears to me that there are some obvious reasons that account for a very high percentage of these problems. I say this out of experience in dealing with such tragedies. I find selfishness to be the root cause of most of it."³

It's easy to blame our spouse for problems, especially the small annoyances that bubble up with daily living. If we concentrate on those problems, they can grow into huge divisions that can sink a marriage.⁴ I've often found that selfishness makes those frustrations grow. Knowing this has helped me to think more about Annie and her needs and helps me to ignore minor annoyances.



We have now been married for 22 years. It hasn't always been easy. Annie and I have had the normal relationship bumps. There have been difficulties over the years. But because of our commitment to the relationship and a willingness to turn to the Lord for answers, we have grown together. As different situations and questions have arisen, we have been able to turn to the scriptures, the teachings of the prophets, and prayer to find solutions.

The average length of a first marriage that ends in divorce is nine years (in the USA).⁵ Because Annie and I built our marriage after the manner the Lord has shown us, we beat those odds. I'm glad we didn't let fear of the world we were raised in stop us. There's always more work to do, but we are both confident that our marriage will continue to improve through the years to come. NE



NOTES

1. See "Children of Divorce More Likely to End Their Marriages," June 27, 2005, news.wise.com/articles/view/512757.
2. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, May 2017, 145.
3. Gordon B. Hinckley, "What God Hath Joined Together," Apr. 1991 general conference.
4. See Lola B. Walters, "The Grapefruit Syndrome," *Ensign*, Apr. 1993, 13.
5. See "Marriage and Divorce: Patterns by Gender, Race, and Educational Attainment," Oct. 2013, Bureau of Labor Statistics, www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2013/article/marriage-and-divorce-patterns-by-gender-race-and-educational-attainment.htm.