“I love calling home just to hear your voice,” my husband said as he left for work. I stopped short for a moment to let the full impact of his words sink in. His short sentence lifted my heart and lightened a morning filled with the usual pressures of motherhood: a crying baby, a hurried breakfast, a messy kitchen.

Words can be a miraculous tool that warms the heart and turns discouragement into hope, frustration into success, and apathy into enthusiasm. They can create feelings of worth as they show consideration, caring, and understanding. Words used this way invite the Lord’s Spirit.

Unfortunately, many of us are stingy with our verbal compliments and praise. As a result, we may one day feel like the man who, mourning at his wife’s graveside, told a friend, “She was a wonderful woman—and one time I almost told her so.”

In marriage partnerships we are especially sensitive to words. Marriages can be strengthened or weakened merely by what is said in a given situation.

Take the ambitious young husband wrestling with a clogged kitchen drain. As he struggles in a contorted position under the sink, he bumps his head and slams down a tool in exasperation. His wife can add to his frustration by complaining about the mess he is making and by asking why he tries to fix things he knows nothing about. Or she can express sympathy for his bruised head and thank him for his efforts to save money.

“Don’t worry about the dented fender on the car,” my husband said as I agonized over being the first to mar our long-awaited new automobile. “It can happen to anyone and isn’t worth fretting about.”

Words of consolation are important when our spouses make mistakes that leave them feeling miserable. Caring words bring feelings of appreciation, offset guilt and internal punishment, and preserve self-respect and personal worth.

A young mother told me she would never forget the day her husband came home distraught over leaving his wallet in a telephone booth. Her first reaction was to criticize his irresponsibility at losing his credit cards and the family’s rent money. But as she glanced at his drooping shoulders and sad, pinched face, she bit her tongue. The credit cards could be replaced, and the rent would just have to be paid a few weeks late. The young mother said the look on her husband’s face—a look
that clearly showed his relief at not being criticized for his forgetfulness—was a momentous reward. After all, she reasoned, what good would have been accomplished had she heaped criticism on her already upset husband?

“You were wonderful. I’m so proud of you,” my husband whispered after I delivered a talk in stake conference that had taken hours of preparation and over which I had felt much anxiety.

Sincere words of praise for effort and accomplishment are just as important as words of understanding for mistakes. Performance need not be perfect to merit praise.

I heard of a high councilor who rescued a teenage boy after the boy muddled a piano solo in sacrament meeting. About halfway through his memorized piano piece and after making several mistakes, the boy forgot the notes, stopped, then started over. When he reached the forgotten passage on second try, he again lost his place, stopped, and started over. This happened four times before he was able to finish the solo. By then, the congregation was suffering nervous anxiety, and wondering what the visiting high councilor would say as he rose to deliver his talk. To everyone’s relief, the high councilor said he had never seen such a wonderful example of persistence. He expressed confidence that the soloist’s tenacity would help him succeed in life. The boy glowed from the compliment.

“No one will start to eat until your mother, who has prepared this lovely meal, sits down and is ready to begin,” my husband said, verbally lifting me from cook to queen while our children sighed and waited eagerly to begin.

Little things in human relations form the foundation of a happy, successful life. If the little things are attended to, the big things will take care of themselves. Lasting happiness seldom comprises monumental events, enormous wealth, stimulating entertainment, or phenomenal success. Happiness is found in the daily events that make up a person’s life. Words of respect, support, and gratitude can make daily events memorable.

“Thanks for all the fresh, beautifully ironed shirts in the closet,” said the note my husband had left for me on the dresser.

Written words can be one of the nicest and most inexpensive gifts we can give. While our son was on a mission, he wrote home on my birthday, apologizing for not having enough money to send me a gift. Expenses had been heavy that month, and he had needed every cent. In place of a gift, he wrote a beautiful poem, recalling our shared experiences and times together. He expressed heartfelt love and fond memories of home. As tears flooded my eyes, I wondered how he could apologize for the most wonderful gift he had ever given me. His present has endured through the years. In moments of despair and sorrow, I have read and reread his poem, always receiving strength and encouragement. The poem has a place of honor in my book of treasured words. It has inspired others to express gratitude and love for parents, and it has strengthened familial bonds.

“I agonize over your pain. When you suffer, I suffer,” my husband said as I walked the floor in the misery of a shingles attack on my aging arm.
Knowing that someone understands and shares your suffering eases life’s burdens and pain. The scriptures tell us, “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). When we share the physical suffering of others, part of the load they bear is transferred to our shoulders. Words of compassion and understanding can provide needed balm.

“How come you love Grandpa so much when you have been married more than fifty years?” my granddaughter asked after a visit. “Because of his words,” I answered. “He has always been so generous with them. His words have given me encouragement, self-worth, pride, and joy. But most of all, his words have reflected the Savior’s love.”