Outline of Series: “Brave Communication”

I. Introduction: communication is a learned skill
   A. The goal: You are able to known and take responsibility for what you mean to say and how you say it, and that you understand what you hear.
      1. There are lots of communication styles I am not addressing directly, like body language, etc.

B. Good communication is an expression of the fruit of self-control
   1. “I have the freedom to tell myself what to do and make myself do it.” —Danny Silk
   2. “I don't control others, but on a good day I can control myself and manage myself in the presence of others.” —Danny Silk

C. The core attitudes and behaviors of good communication.
   1. Love. All of these skills function best when love is in play.
   2. Negotiation is normal and crisis/conflict can lead to deeper relationships if we are skilled.
   3. Think WIN/WIN (we both are powerful) not WIN/LOSE (I win, you lose), LOSE/WIN (I am a victim), LOSE/LOSE (I'll just destroy the whole thing). —Stephen R. Covey, Seven Habits of Highly Effective People
   4. Seek first to understand, then to be understood. —Stephen R. Covey, Seven Habits of Highly Effective People
      “What's going on . . ?” “Please help me understand your thinking when...?” “I'm confused...”
      “Could you help me understand why you thought . . .” “Oh no, what happened?”
      “Would you walk me through your thought processes...?”
   5. Connect first, then give content—if need be. Most often the first step is CONNECTING.
      Let CONTENT come after.
II. Choosing our words and speaking in code.
A. People often say, “It is not what you said; it’s the way you said it”. This is true but only half the truth. It is both what we say and the way we say it.
B. Everybody's got a codebook they think is “standard issue,” but really no two are alike. Don’t judge a codebook issue. There’s no right or wrong on many of these things.
C. Check out all codebook confusion and “vibes” with a SUPER POWERFUL, SOLID GOLD PHRASE: “I’m wondering if…”. Instead of being suspicious of them, be highly suspicious of your imaginary ability to know what someone is thinking and/or their motives.
D. When in doubt, open up your thought process to the other person. “I feel really awkward and anxious, but I have to bring up a few things because my connection to you is weakening…”

III. Scriptures' ideas about communication: Rebuke, repent, forgive

At times when we are learning new communication skills, it feels uncomfortable and unnatural. “This isn’t the real me. It’s not how I talk.” But the Scripture counsels us to be in control of our inner world and how we express it. In other words, we are responsible for our communication style.

- “A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult” (Prov. 12:16).
- “Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing” (Prov. 12:18).
- “A fool's talk brings a rod to his back, but the lips of the wise protect them” (Prov. 13:3).
- “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Prov. 15:1).
- “The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit” (Prov. 15:4).
- “A man finds joy in giving an apt reply—and how good is a timely word!” (Prov. 15:23).
- “The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil” (Prov. 15:28).
- “A wise man's heart guides his mouth, and his lips promote instruction” (Prov. 16:23).
- “Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones. There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death” (Prov. 16:24–25).
- “A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered” (Prov. 17:27).
- “From the fruit of his mouth a man's stomach is filled; with the harvest from his lips he is satisfied. The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit” (Prov. 18:20–21).
- “He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity” (Prov. 21:23).
- “An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips” (Prov. 24:26).
- “Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone” (Prov. 25:15).
- “You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34).
- “But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man ‘unclean.’” (Matt. 15:18).
- “Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ” (Eph. 4:15).
- “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen” (Eph. 4:29).
- “I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:1b–3).
- “Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity” (1 Tim 4:12).
• “We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check ... Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body but it makes great boasts ... It corrupts the whole person, set the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell ... My brothers, this should not be ...” (Portions of James 3:1–12).
• If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. 1 Peter 4:11a

REBUKE, REPENT, FORGIVE. Luke 17:1–10

IV. **Knowing Your Own Heart: Learning about feelings**

We tend to think communication is mostly about information, but it is also largely about our emotions and how information impacts them. So being aware and comfortable with emotions and aware of our body is important.

1. The ability to feel is GOD GIVEN. He created us and said, “It is good!” He made, values and enjoys this part of us. Feelings are not the problem. They are part of being made in the image of a PASSIONATE GOD! In Scripture we see God has feelings—but they are tempered by other parts of His nature.

2. Feelings are not “the real or deepest you” as the enemy would have us believe. Rather, they are only a part of you. You can think about feelings, judge or ignore them, enjoy them or choose to do other than you feel. We are more than our feelings, drives, and experiences.

3. Feelings are often temporary; they come and go. I might feel different in 10 minutes or 10 weeks; or if I get some sleep, eat, pray, get new information, exercises, connect with someone.

4. Feelings are not always logical or reasonable—but often times they are very logical and reasonable.

5. The reasons behind a feeling might not make sense to you, but the feeling is still real for you or the individual and very powerful. If you value yourself or the person, then you must value the depth of the feeling—because it is being genuinely experienced (though you may not like or understand it).

6. Having a feeling is reasonable, but expressing it may not be. It’s not necessary that everyone knows all my feelings and treats all of them tenderly all the time.

7. For any feeling you have, there are many possibilities about how you can express it. Hint: “Say” the negative feelings if you need to, but “Display” the good ones.

8. There are 4 main emotions: GLAD, SAD, MAD and AFRAID.

9. Your head will often lie to you about what you are feeling—YOUR BODY USUALLY WON’T. (Neither will the Holy Spirit.)

10. The more hidden your feelings are from yourself and others, the less alive you are.

11. Any time you hide a significant feeling from someone, you create a “hidden agenda,” and may possibly block communication and growth with that person in that area.

12. It takes as much energy to hide and deny feelings as it does to work through them, and there is no chance the situation will build intimacy, so you might as well spend the energy in connection.
13. Intimacy is NOT “He knows exactly what I am feeling without me having to say it.” Rather, intimacy is “I trust her and our relationship enough to tell her what I feel,” and “He makes me feel safe, so I want to tell him what’s on my mind.” SHARING FEELINGS AND BEING HEARD BUILDS INTIMACY.

14. TURN THE OTHER CHEEK. “Others may have an attacking style, but I will not attack.” “I might be the target, but I will not target another.” Return good for evil.

15. The truth may be hard but it doesn’t have to be “harsh. “It’s the truth!” is not a excuse for carelessness.

16. Take responsibility for your feelings. Believe it or not, with GRACE and practice, we most often can choose our response to circumstances. If our feelings control our actions, it is because we have abdicated our “response-ability” and empowered our feelings to control us.

17. Telling yourself, “It won’t change the situation or do any good if I talk to them” is a form of not trusting yourself or them. It’s a self-protecting deception that says, “My only power is withholding information.”

18. Crisis, pain and loss are not optional in this life. IF YOU CLOSE YOURSELF TO THESE, YOU CLOSE YOUR HEART TO OPPORTUNITY, JOY AND LOVE. These are experienced in the same spot in our heart, and God often works in them to shape us.

19. FEELINGS CHANGE BY:
   a) Being shared and understood by God or another.
   b) Getting a different perspective of a situation (like new information or a new belief).
   c) Medication.
   d) Praying about them. Our feelings are a part of us, which is both sanctified and being sanctified. Sometimes believing a lie damages our emotions. God may work immediately and supernaturally, or work over time, or have you work through them the old-fashioned way (by expressing them and being understood or renewing our mind with His word).
   e) Being reflected upon through journaling, poetry or self-talk.
V. LISTEN LIKE YOU MEAN IT! Reflective and active listening

USE THESE SKILLS WHEN:
1. You hear or have strong feelings.
2. You hear or have confusion about the message.
3. The person clearly communicates they have a problem.
4. You are problem solving, like making plans or hearing another's point of view in order to make a cooperative decision.

REFLECTIVE LISTENING
Just like its title indicates, “REFLECTIVE LISTENING” means you mirror the statement you just heard. Sometimes you do it without the inflection (tone or emotions), and sometimes you do it with.

Your wife is frustrated because for several years you've waited until the last moment to schedule your vacation with your boss—and you seem to be doing it again. You already feel silly for doing this, especially when you know it bothers her, so you feel really defensive about it. She sends you a good old “I message”:
“I FEEL anxious and frustrated WHEN you put off scheduling our vacation BECAUSE part of the fun for me is the weeks of looking forward and dreaming about it.”

Instead of reacting, explaining or defending yourself; the first step is to repeat EXACTLY WHAT SHE SAID: “You feel anxious and frustrated when I put off scheduling our vacation because part of the fun for you is the weeks of looking forward to and dreaming about it.”

This gives you time to appreciate the good stuff she's communicating—like she looks forward to your vacations together and you've married a woman who enjoys anticipation—BEFORE you explain or communicate that vacation works differently for you, so you didn't know it worked that way for her.

Simply put, this skill helps the present message to really sink in so you are not reacting to last month's conversation; enables you to respond and not react; and causes the message giver to hear the words they just gave you. In the case of a horrible painful message, the sender has their own words repeated so they can experience their sharpness. “You hate me and think I’m ruining your life.” “I feel extremely hurt...”

ACTIVE LISTENING
1. Listen to the EMOTION FIRST and not the content.
2. Reflect the emotion to see if you've got it right. “You sound excited;” “You seem hurt;” “Frustrated?”
3. Draw out the feelings they have even if they don't know what they are feeling. In other words, listen, use reflective listening, nod, say “I get that.” When (and if) it's appropriate, ask if they want your take or input.

This skill helps people articulate their emotions and makes them feel safe with you. It allows love and connection to do the healing instead of information. It builds intimacy and equips you to stand in the storm with someone. People feel less threatened that your agenda is to manipulate or change them. It encourages deeper talking instead of only dealing with problem solving skills.

In order for Active Listening to succeed, you've got to cultivate a couple of attitudes. You've got to be able to genuinely accept a person's feelings. Trust that the Holy Spirit will change them instead of you. Know that
feelings change like a traffic light. See the other, even your kids, as people who are separate from you—they are not you. And most importantly, YOU HAVE GOT TO WANT TO HEAR. Don't open up a person's heart and then run off 'cause you're late or tired. If you can't spend the time, offer to schedule a time when you can. Finally, don't use active listening when the person obviously needs something else from you. “Nancy, have you seen the scissors?” “Jim you seem real anxious about the scissors...”

VI. Door-openers and invitations

One of the most effective and constructive ways of responding to feeling-messages or problem-messages is the “door opener” or “invitation to say more.” These are responses that do not communicate any of the listener’s own ideas or judgments or feelings. They open the door; they invite him/her to talk. The simplest of these are such non-committal responses as:

- Really?
- Oh.
- You don't say
- I see.
- Mm, hmmm.
- How about that.
- You did, huh?
- Interesting.
- Is that so?

Others are somewhat more explicit in conveying an invitation to talk or to say more, such as:

- Tell me about it.
- I'd like to hear about it
- Tell me more.
- I'd be interested in your point of view.
- Let's discuss it.
- Would you like to talk about it?
- Shoot. I'm listening.
- Let's hear what you have to say.
- Tell me the whole story.
- Sounds like you've got something to say about . . .
- This seems like something important to you.

These door openers or invitations to talk can be potent facilitators of another person's communication. They encourage people to start or to continue talking. They also “keep the ball with him.” They don't have the effect of your grabbing the ball away from him, as do messages of your own—such as asking questions, giving advice, teaching, moralizing, and so on. They keep your own feelings and thoughts out of the communication process. The responses of people to these simple door openers will surprise you. They feel encouraged to move in closer, open up, and literally pour out their feeling and ideas. People love to talk and usually do when anyone extends an invitation to do so.

They also convey acceptance of the person and respect for him as a person by telling, in effect:

- I respect you as a person with ideas and feelings.
- I really want to hear your point of view.
- Your ideas are worthy of being listened to.
- I am interested in you.

NOTE: This section, Door-openers and Invitations, is primarily from a communication training I received in 1987. The material is not original with me. It was not footnoted, and I could not find information to properly footnote it.
VII. **Usual communication strategies are best saved for later**

When another is communicating a problem, a strong feeling, or a confused or hidden message; TRY TO AVOID THESE TYPICAL HUMAN RESPONSES until later in the process, if at all. Listen and wait. Most people don't need to be, or want to be “fixed,” but they want to be heard. Often, love—expressed as listening—will help them grow. Try “Reflective” and “Active” listening before using the strategies listed below as they help people understand themselves and gain confidence that they are powerful and capable of growing.

A. **DELAY OR AVOID USING AUTHORITY TO CREATE A CHANGE IN ATTITUDE OR BEHAVIOR.**
   1. Directing, ordering, commanding.
      “You must.” “You will.” “You have to.” “Stop that.” “Go there.”
   2. Warning, threatening, admonishing.
      “You had better, or else.” “If you don’t, then…”
   3. Moralizing, obligating.
      You ought to.” “It’s your duty and responsibility to…”

B. **DELAY USING INFORMATION TO CREATE A CHANGE.**
   1. Persuading with logic, argument, facts or instruction.
      “Do you realize…” “The facts of the matter are…” “Yes, but on the other hand…” “Look at it this way…”
   2. Advising, recommending, giving answers.
      “What I would do is this…” “Let me suggest…” “It would be best for you to…” “You should try this…”
   3. Questioning, probing, cross-examination.
      Delay or avoid these because the person may:
      a.) Simply justify their behavior. “Why did you do that?” “Because He hit me”
      b.) Answer in a guarded, short manner to avoid connection.
      c.) May be overwhelmed by you so the conversation is quickly over.
   4. Praising and approving. (If we jump too quickly to this we may miss the issue of their heart or miss an opportunity for them experience the joy of telling you how it felt to do the right thing, etc.)
      “You are right in doing that.” “That was a nice thing to do.” “My, how smart you are…” Etc.
   5. Giving support, reassurance, validation (These are great but should follow listening.)
      “It’s really not so bad.” “Don’t worry it will pass.” “You’ll feel better.” “I felt that way too once.”
   6. Diagnosing, interpreting, offering insights.
      “This is what your problem really is…” “The real issue or cause is…”

C. **AVOID MESSAGES DESIGNED TO MAKE ANOTHER FEEL SMALL IN ORDER TO CREATE A CHANGE.**
   1. Criticizing, judging, shaming.
      “You are wrong.” “You are not thinking straight.” “You have made a mistake.” “That was very foolish.”
   2. Diverting, avoiding, by-passing.
      “Let’s not talk about it now.” “That reminds me of something else.” “Why don’t you go for a walk.”
   3. Kidding, hyperbole, teasing, sarcasm, name calling.
      “Why don’t you burn the school down?” “Don’t be so adolescent.” “When did they make you God?”
   4. Silence, ignoring.
      “Until you change or apologize, you just don’t exist.”
   5. You’re stupid or uninformed.
      “You should have known I felt this way.” “We all think…” “Everybody knows that you don’t…”
VIII. Owning your message and sharing your experience with an “I” message.

“It” messages and “you” messages are extremely common. Most of us have been using some form of them all of our lives. Try to use more “I” messages, or some adaptation of them, when you hear or have a strong emotion, confusion or problem solving.

A. The “it” message.

These messages point to a sender who is insecure and/or unable to own the message. Lots of people use humor or sarcasm when using an “it” message.

1) “That’s not working for me.” Real message: “I’m frustrated and want you to do it differently.”
2) “It’s wrong to break a promise.” Real message: “I’m mad and want you to do what you say you are going to do.”
3) “It must be nice to come to work whenever you want.” Real message: “I want you to be on time.”
4) “Excuses are so annoying.” Real message: “I want you to accept responsibility for your actions.”
5) “Being around you is confusing.” Real message: “This is more your fault than mine.”
6) “It’s really cold in here.” Real message: “Please turn up the heat.” (Notice that we may use these messages even when no one has a strong or confused emotion but we simply want them to do something.)

B. The “you” message.

This is the most popular, and often least helpful, message we send. “You” messages feel like judgment to the hearer – often because they are! “Power plays” often start with “you” messages. They create defensiveness and often produce a volley of “you” messages between people. They trigger the “fight, flight, or freeze” mechanism in people. The sender owns the message but does so aggressively and communicates little of the personal information that can build a bridge or lead to greater trust.

1) “You are not doing it right.”
2) “You broke your promise and never follow through with what you say you are going to do.”
3) “You are late again.”
4) “You have an excuse for everything.”
5) “You are confusing me.”
6) “Why do you keep your house so cold?”

C. The “I” message.

With an “I” message the sender takes responsibility (owns) the message and lets the other person know the feelings their behavior or response has sparked in them (which they may or may not be directly responsible for). IT DOESN’T ASSUME MOTIVES. It has to do with the “here and now” and its connection to the past or present. It is honest and is more likely to elicit discussion than defensiveness as it doesn’t necessarily make a judgment about the behavior but describes how I’m experiencing the situation.

The “I Message” has three parts—four once you have heard the other person and feel heard.

1. The feeling “I feel . . .” (mad, sad, glad, or afraid – find the right word to express the right level of emotion)
2. The non-blaming description of my observation or problem “when . . .” This is a KEY element as it has the capacity to increase or decrease anxiety. Also, by focusing on describing behavior and skipping our guess at their motive it avoids misunderstandings.
3. The tangible effects of the behavior, response, or attitude on me “because . . .”
“I feel ___________ when _______________because ___________________.”

USE THE FORMULA REGULARLY UNTIL YOU GET GOOD—EVEN IF YOU FEEL AWKWARD.

1) “I am concerned (sad and afraid) when you ask me to do it that way because it doesn’t match the standards I was taught or what I understand to be legal.”
2) “I am frustrated (mad and afraid) when the dishes aren’t done after you’ve said you will do them because it feels like a pattern and that I don’t count.”
3) “I am frustrated (mad) that you are late again this morning because it makes me feel like you don’t value your job or me.”
4) “I am agitated (mad) when you don’t take responsibility for your actions, because am afraid you don’t see this as a problem and I do.”
5) “I feel confused. You wanted to get together, but you seem quiet.”
6) “I am cold, would you please turn up the heat?” This is a clear request and they may say no but at least it is what you are really thinking and feeling.)

4. At the beginning of the conflict, it is sometimes good to just hear each other’s emotions without moving too quickly to a resolution; seeking to understand first, before you make yourself understood. When you have heard each other’s heart and are ready to move to a resolution or problem solving make your hopes/needs/likes known by suggesting some alternatives.

“So could we...?” , “So let’s...”, “What if we....”, “Could you please...?” Would you consider...?”

There are some instances where suggesting a “new normal” early in the process is rushing it. But there are other times that it is exactly what is needed. Knowing when to do so is a skill you will grow into.

Without this part of the “I” message, where you are bravely suggesting a mutually beneficial solution (a win/win), the “I” messages may feel like it doesn’t lead anywhere or we are using our emotions to manipulate each other.

Here is the full pattern:

“I feel ___________when _______________ because________________. So, I’m wondering if ________________”

Furthermore, once you formulate the “I” message, you have a pretty good idea of what’s going on with you and then you can decide if it is still a good idea to give the emotion or even the message now. Perhaps, hearing each other’s hearts is the best thing to do for now.

Try to use the right intensity for the emotion you’re sharing that the other person can process. If we say, “I’m livid!!!” when the other person is already afraid, they may panic. Or if someone says, “I’m livid,” when they are really just bothered, it confuses people in the midst of trying to connect.

Some people may not be able to handle emotional words. It may become too personal too quickly. So you are being wise and kind when you pick non-emotional words to begin with to keep their fight, flight or freeze mechanism from firing. As well, you may not wish to share your emotions at this particular point and need a safer way into the conversation. Words like, “I’m uncomfortable, nervous, concerned, hurt, tender, surprised,
“Caught off guard” may be more your style and fit the situation, though press yourself to understand the deeper emotion.

IX. Listening for Feelings
Here are some messages folks may send. Read the statements, listen for the feeling, jot down the feeling or feelings you hear, and write a quick response based on what you’ve learned. If you aren't sure of the context, just make one up! Careful, there are some trick questions!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEY SAY</th>
<th>THEY ARE FEELING</th>
<th>ACTIVE LISTENING RESPONSE</th>
<th>MORE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I can't figure it out. I'm stupid. I give up.”</td>
<td>1. Sad/fear/mad 2. Discouraged</td>
<td>“You sound discouraged.”</td>
<td>“You sound discouraged.”</td>
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<td>“Don't ask me what's wrong. You should know.”</td>
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<td>“Am I doing this right?”</td>
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<td>“Honey, I took out the trash.”</td>
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<td>“They are my friends. You don't even know them like you think you do.”</td>
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<td>“You are a lazy pig.”</td>
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<td>“What time is dinner?”</td>
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<td>“You always accuse me of lying.”</td>
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X. Practicing “I” Messages & Emotions

Exercise One: How’s that feel?
Read all three sentences together. Then note the emotional and verbal response likely created in the hearer.

IT: “That’s not working for me.” ____________________________________________________________
YOU: “You are not doing it right.” ___________________________________________________________
I: “I am concerned (sad and afraid) when you do it that way because it doesn't fit with the way I’ve been trained. ____________________________________________________________

IT: “It must be nice to come to work whenever you want.” ______________________________________
YOU: “You are late again.” ________________________________________________________________
I: “I am frustrated (mad) that you are late again this morning because it makes me feel like you don’t value your job or me.” ____________________________________________________________

Exercise Two: What type of message is being communicated?
Below are triplet statements that reflect an “it,” “you” and “I” message. In the space next to each sentence, write which type of statement it is.

_________ “You better not talk to me that way.”
_________ “I feel angry when you talk to me that way because it makes me feel incompetent.”
_________ “That’s not a great way to talk to someone.”

_________ “It's fun to share.”
_________ “I’m happy when you share because it makes me feel like we’re a team.”
_________ “You're not a sharer.”

_________ “You didn't do the dishes again.”
_________ “It would really be great to come home to a clean kitchen some night.”
_________ “I feel frustrated when you say you'll do the dishes and you don't because it's happened three nights in a row.”

_________ “I am concerned that the process isn't working well and that I will be blamed.”
_________ “You're not doing things in a good way.”
_________ “This process is awful.”
Exercise Three: Write an “I’m wondering if…” / “Could you please…” phrase for each of the “I” messages above.

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

Exercise Four: Composing a non-blaming description of the problem or situation.

1. Your boss has asked you to do something that you believe is not ethical. ____________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________

2. Your child’s teacher has just told you for the first time after many months of school that your child has been acting out and she doesn’t want him in class anymore. ____________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________

3. Your neighbor’s dog is regularly using your lawn as a toilet. ____________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________

4. In front of the whole group, someone in your bible study flatly states that one of your cherished beliefs is heresy and completely ridiculous. ____________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________

Exercise Five: Composing an “I” message

IT: “It’s a bummer we aren’t more intimate.” YOU: “You don’t do intimacy very well, do you?”
I: ______________________________________________________________________________________

IT: “That’s a good way to get us in an accident.” YOU: “You’re driving is scaring me!”
I: ______________________________________________________________________________________

IT: “Wow! Every light in the house is on.” YOU: “Why is it so hard for you to turn off the lights?”
I: ______________________________________________________________________________________