



The Power of “Un-”

Un- ... just two little letters until they are added to the beginning of a word, but then *un-* changes everything. With *un-*, “clear” becomes “unclear.” What was “spoken” is now “unspoken.” “Met” is now “unmet,” and “realistic” is transformed to “unrealistic.” When we then add unclear, unspoken, unmet, and unrealistic to describe our expectations of ourselves or our sisters in Christ, this becomes a recipe for “unhappiness.”

Expectations are often based on past experience or values and are anticipated with excitement. When we work together to serve God, we bring our expectations into the group. Often, everyone involved has their own idea of what should happen, but this is not necessarily what *does* happen. Because we are sinners and therefore imperfect, unclear and unspoken expectations can surface if we make assumptions that everyone agrees with us. Unfortunately, we do not always communicate expectations to our sisters. We assume they think like us, often because they have not shared their ideas.

To confuse the situation further, some groups have “unwritten rules” which may not have been communicated to new participants:

- We’ve always done it this way;
- You should want to be part of this activity;
- It is someone else’s turn;
- You should be able to figure this out;
- If we say it is important, it is; and
- You should care about this.

These rules may be rooted in guilt and tradition instead of a desire to serve. They contribute to power struggles, manipulation, and resistance to change. In other words, if rules aren’t shared, you can be kept from making changes that will make the group “uncomfortable.” Soon the group is “unclear” of its purpose in their service to God. Newcomers to the group are coerced into leadership positions for which they are “unprepared.” They may feel “unwelcome” as their efforts are critiqued, and possibly criticized, by others.

How can we combat the power of *un-* in our relationships and expectations? Consider the following:

- Welcome — Invite all women to attend activities, even if they haven’t been able to come in the past. Eagerly greet newcomers, introduce them to others in attendance, and thank them for coming to the event. As they join others in the activity and respond to all that God has given them through faith in Jesus, they can more easily feel a part of the group as they contribute to the kingdom.
- Clear — Each group has its own set of unwritten rules and rituals. When these are not shared with newcomers, misunderstandings can occur and feelings get hurt. When we recognize past experiences that affect our perceptions, we are free to state our expectations and be “clear” about what we can contribute for the benefit of the group.
- Comfortable — Encourage without pressure. Let each redeemed child of God, through prayer and the study of God’s Word, along with the encouragement of fellow believers, decide what they want to share and where they can serve. Then mentor and help them.
- Prepared — Through the use of Personal Development resources* found on the LWML website, women can discover their spiritual gifts as well as their God-given talents and abilities. With those in mind, help women find opportunities to serve others as Christ has served them by using these gifts, talents, and abilities.

When women are invited and feel part of a group where they are valued and wanted, they will overflow with joy and will want to serve the Lord with you when given an opportunity. Strive to eliminate *un-* from your vocabulary as you connect with other women in mission to *Serve the Lord with gladness* (Psalm 100:2a).

***Resources:**

Bible Studies: <http://www.lwml.org/long-bible-studies>

Scroll down the page for:

- *Gifts Chosen For You* — Spiritual Gifts Bible Study

Bible Studies for Leaders:

- *Christian Leaders Bible Study*
- *Gifted for Service*
- *Mentoring Bible Studies*

Personal Development webpage

<http://www.lwml.org/posts/leadership/personal-development>

Volunteers in Christ's Ministry webpage

<http://www.lwml.org/posts/leadership/volunteers-in-christs-ministry>

LWML Growth and Development Committee
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League
Originally Published March 2013
www.lwml.org

