

“We can be the first to wait. We might be at a disadvantage. We might not be able to impress the guests as well with our knowledge, but we will be able to be present in the moment.”

Waiting is a painful discipline for teenagers who make plans on the fly and expect to get a text response within minutes, if not seconds. (To be fair, not all teenagers want everything instantly.) Impatience dogs adults, too.

A friend’s daughter announced she was going off *Facebook*. She was just too available, all the time. She wanted to wait to talk with friends until they were “in the flesh” at school. Over lunch last week a friend shared that two of the four adults with whom she was out sharing a meal had their PDAs tucked under the table ready to check the stock market.

We’d all benefit from waiting. We’d have more time to engage life more deeply, to listen to our beloveds more closely, and to come to know God and ourselves more lovingly. I suspect that many of us realize this. Still, we hurry our days. So, if impatience makes us worse off, why don’t we stop?

Economists have a word for behavior that on the individual level makes sense, but ceases to do so collectively, called the “fallacy of composition.” For example: Suppose you are at a football game. The person in front of you obstructs your vision ever so slightly, so you stand up to see better. The person behind you can no longer see, so she stands up. Now the person behind her can’t see, and the person behind her, and so on. The dominos continue to fall until everyone is standing and no one can see any better than when they were sitting. No one is better off. In fact, everyone is worse off, because standing takes more energy to sustain.

What does this have to do with waiting? If you are the only one who isn’t instantly available or isn’t always trying to get there first, you’ll be behind the curve. Take the situation facing teenagers. If they aren’t on *Facebook*, entire conversations and perhaps social plans will have been made before school the next day. Those who waited to see one another the next day wouldn’t be “in on it.” No one wants to be left out. And face it; we don’t want to be “on the out” either. If we want to be able to impress dinner table guests, we’d better have ordered our *Amazon* books with *Prime* purchases so we can read them sooner.

So, how do we stop this race? How do we slow down together? Shared rituals such as

Advent are one way. If everyone slowed down, everyone would be better off with more time to savor and not be left behind. Christians are called to proclaim this gospel—that we put aside the urge to be the one to get ahead so that all might have enough. Waiting is a part of building the peaceable kingdom where the ox and the lion eat straw together and all have enough. Waiting is good news for everyone.

So back to the football analogy. If one person sits down at a football game he will no longer be able to see the game. If we all sit down everyone can see. We can be the first to wait. We might be at a disadvantage. We might not be able to impress the guests as well with our knowledge, but we will be able to be present in the moment. At the end of our waiting is a Savior, a light to the world who will reveal the peaceable kingdom to all.

As a family, commit to creating a practice of waiting together. Together, you will begin to create that blessing for all. Use the example of a football game to acknowledge that waiting is difficult, but if we all wait together, everyone will be better off. No one would be behind the ball. One little sign of the peaceable kingdom will emerge. Advent is a time where the peaceable kingdom is breaking in. It is breaking in through us.

We are called to be the people who will sit down at the football game — to make that sacrifice to show a better way. The way is hard, but we are assured that we are asked to be faithful. God will wait with us.

---

*Jenifer Gamber, author of “[My Faith, My Life](#)” for teenagers and “[Your Faith, Your Life](#)” for adults, is a popular speaker on the topics of spirituality, prayer, and teen faith formation. She lives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.*