

In the game of musical chairs people grab any available chair when the music stops. After all, if you want to stay in the game, you've got to sit down. But outside the game, once enough chairs are provided, people get a little picky about which seat they take. In a cafeteria we decide whose company we want to share and whose we wish to avoid. If you want a good seat for the Chiefs you reserve season tickets a year in advance. People rearrange their weekend just so they can keep those seats. When the symphony plays, the ranking of choice seats doesn't stop when you get to the stage. Professional musicians know very well who's a first chair violin, who's a second, and who's eighth.

Seating and status fit so tightly that it's surprising when people don't take advantage of good seats. This summer, the Royals offered a special promotional night: Buy a ticket and sit anywhere in the stadium you like--no reserved seats. Mysteriously, that particular night drew the worst attendance of the summer. They're still trying to figure it out. I suspect one reason is that for a lot of people who buy baseball tickets, every night is sit-anywhere-in-the-stadium-you-like night. Tickets carry numbers, but they don't correspond to where people actually sit, especially by the sixth inning. Then there's church--every day is sit-whenever-you-like day at church. So, which seats do people come early to get? The ones in the back! Once a certain parish had a problem with latecomers. But they decided instead of scolding people, they'd offer hospitality by reserving the last pews in the church for those who couldn't get there on time. That way they could sit down without worrying about disrupting the service. Great idea, but the people who sat in the back pew wouldn't give up their seats--especially for latecomers.

Jesus also suggests some pretty surprising behavior. He says when you go someplace where the seats aren't reserved, don't go after the best seats whether they're in the back or in the front. Take a seat where it just doesn't matter; show some courtesy. People will respect you for it. When you leave a crowded parking lot, let some other car in front of you. When you're in a long line at the grocery store and they suddenly open another checkout aisle, don't try out for the Olympics; let somebody else get there first. When you approach a door, hold it open for someone else. We're so concerned about protecting our place, but that place isn't worth protecting if we take it at someone else's expense. Life is not a game of musical chairs. Life comes with lots of seats and plenty good music. Let's share.