

Shelving the past

By [L. Gail Irwin](#)

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I called my carpenter friend Daryl when I needed some bookshelves installed on the wall of our tiny spare room. I have a collection of books that I had no room to store. I wanted the south wall of the room full of shelves, top to bottom.

Daryl came and studied the room.

“Why do you want shelves on the south wall?” he asked.

“Because that’s where they used to be.” I said without thinking.

“Why don’t we put them on the north wall?” he suggested. I explained that wall had a pocket door in it and we couldn’t drive nails through it.

“We could anchor the shelves from the ceiling,” he said.

Whoever heard of such a thing?

“Or how about we put the shelves on the east wall?” he asked.

“There’s a window in that wall so there isn’t as much space for shelving,” I reasoned.

“The south wall has a window, too. It’s the same size,” he argued.

“Daryl,” I said. “Don’t you ever just do what the customer wants?”

At that, he asked me to leave the room . He studied the problem in silence for awhile and called me back in.

“This room is so small, you shouldn’t take up any floor space with shelving,” he announced. “We’ll hang the shelving up above, say, 18 inches from the ceiling all around. That way, you can have lots of shelving without using any floor space.”

“But I won’t be able to reach the books up there,” I protested.

He pointed to a step stool in the corner.

“But that’s so much trouble just to get down a book!” I went on.

“And how often do you think you’ll be getting them down?” he asked.

This wisdom- from a man who doesn’t even read books.

I have worked with Daryl enough to know his solutions are usually far better than mine, so I gave in and let him hang the shelving from the ceiling. The result is practical and looks cool.

I have since perched some books on the new shelves. I chose some I don’t read very often, but refuse to part with: Frederick Buechner, Wendell Berry, the complete works of Annie Dillard and Joan Didion. I included some I want people to *think* I read: Paul Tillich, Augustine’s Confessions, my behemoth Strong’s Concordance. *And* I culled a couple bags of books that, truthfully, I will never open again.

But the best part is--there’s room up there for some future books that haven’t even been written yet!

When I called Daryl, all I could see was the hole where the shelves *used to be* and the books I was clinging to from my past. But Daryl doesn’t bring past baggage to his jobs. He considers what is needed *now* and finds a new way to solve the problem.

Thanks, Daryl, for your ability to respond to what is needed *now* instead of trying to recreate the past. If only we could teach ourselves as church leaders to do the same!

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