



ON A SHELF DIRECTLY BEHIND ME as I sit at my desk is a copy of *Webster's New World Dictionary* (Second College Edition, 1980). Alongside it is a copy of *The Chicago Manual of Style: The Essential Guide for Writers, Editors, and Publishers* (14th Edition, 1993). These and other reference books are within arm's reach of where I do my work because more often than not they supply immediate and succinct answers to common, recurring questions that arise during the process of writing, editing and publishing. These reference books are valuable, necessary—some even cherished; I could not fulfill my calling without them. Yet, as valuable as they are, not one of them have I read cover-to-cover. They are just there on the shelf, available to me for when I need them.

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The relationship I have with the reference books on the shelf behind me is the same relationship most people have with God. For them, He is just there, waiting and available to them whenever He is needed. When they need a quick answer to a problem, a shoulder to cry on, or someone to whom they can safely vent their rage, they reach back to the handy shelf where they keep God. Save for that, they keep Him out of sight, and out of mind.

While it is true that God is personal, condescending and available, He cannot be kept on a shelf—

Thus says the Lord,
“Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool.
Where then is a house you could build for Me?
And where is a place that I may rest?”

Isaiah 66:1

—neither will He be ignored.

“Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O Lord, and You exalt Yourself as head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone.”

1 Chronicles 29:11-12

Those who prefer to keep God tucked away on a shelf have a skewed notion of the relationship:

He is not a utility; He is sovereign Lord.
He is not in our hands; we are in His.

Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.
Before the mountains were born
Or You gave birth to the earth and the world,
Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.

Psalms 90:1-2

There comes a point in every person's life—every person, without exception—when this truth is either gloriously or painfully confirmed. The God of heaven will not be set aside, ignored or denied. He will not be treated as simply a handy resource for quick and painless absolution, for the way out of a bad situation, for wish fulfillment.

Those who come to this realization early, enjoy a full and rich life in which their Lord is a constant companion, a gracious and merciful Father. They revel in the privilege of being part of His life, as they glory in His condescension into theirs.

Those who come to this later, may enjoy the same, but have along with it the burden of regret for all those wasted years in which their God was little more than a quick reference on the shelf.

Those who never come to this in life—those who never knew God at all, or even took Him down from the shelf—will be made painfully aware in death

that the God they spent their life pointedly ignoring is indeed sovereign, and that His Son, Jesus Christ, is indeed Lord of all.

Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:8-11