

**E** is for effort. The spiritually lazy will hear little from God. It takes work to be a student of the Bible. There are places where reading the Bible is easy and exciting, but sometimes we must struggle to mine the gold that is there. The book of Acts tells us that when Paul visited the Bereans, “they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” (Acts 17:11) Scholars and teachers can help us examine the scriptures. Commentaries and good books can expand our understanding. Using our hearts as we read does not exclude the need to use our minds. At times it takes hard, diligent study to hear clearly what God wants to say.

**A** is for application. God expects something of us after we have read His Word. What we hear from Him is to be applied to life. If we never act upon what He tells us, we will eventually lose our capacity to hear Him. “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock”, Jesus said. (Matthew 7:24) At times we are simply to respond with faith, gratitude or joy to what we have read. But at other times God expects active expressions of love toward Himself and others. The Bible calls for obedience, and points us to the Holy Spirit who empowers us to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. Those who most clearly hear God in the Bible are those who have let it shape their lives and their capacity to hear.

**R** is for relationship. God loves us and desires to communicate with us. He has chosen the Bible as a primary way of doing that. In it he shares his heart, supremely expressed in Jesus Christ. The Bible introduces us to Him. It lets us know our need for a Savior and invites us to make Christ Lord of our lives. When that happens, a new kind of relationship with God is established. At that point the Holy Spirit comes into our lives and gives us “inner ears” for hearing what God is saying. On the road to Emmaus, as the resurrected Jesus was walking unrecognized with some disciples, “...he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.” (Luke 24:27). When we walk with Him, He opens the Scriptures for us, too.

We prize the bound Book, but it serves a purpose beyond itself. As a well known hymn has put it, “Beyond the sacred page, we seek Thee Lord.” Knowing and hearing from God is the bottom line. That involves HUMILITY, EFFORT, APPLICATION AND RELATIONSHIP as we come to his Word. “He who has ears, let him hear.”

#### POSSIBLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What makes it hard for you to read the Bible regularly?
2. What makes it even harder to apply what you read?
3. Why is having a personal relationship with Christ important for understanding what you read in the Bible?