

# Preface

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All those who have contributed to this Study Guide share the conviction that the Bible is crucial to the life and health of the Church. We, the editors, also share a ministry within the Langham Partnership International that is founded on three convictions, first articulated by its founder, John Stott: that God wants his Church to grow up in maturity (not just to grow bigger in numbers); that the Church grows through the word of God; and that the word of God comes to the people of God through the ministry of those who preach and teach it with clarity, faithfulness and relevance. So when we were invited by SPCK to contribute a volume on *Understanding and Using the Bible* to the series of International Study Guides, our hearts warmed to the vision. For if those convictions are true, then the logical question to ask is, how can we help people to handle the Bible better in their own study and to use it more effectively in their ministry? We pray that this book may provide some modest help in that direction.

We are grateful to the other contributors from around the world, friends who we know use the Bible in their particular spheres of ministry in a great variety of ways. Of course there are many, many more people whom we could have asked, and many other contexts in which the Bible is being used around the world, and many other methods of using it. We are only too well aware of the limitations of the selection of topics and contributors we have made to keep the book within its allotted size. However, our hope is that these examples of creative use of the Bible in a few contexts, written out of the experience of women and men who live and work in all continents, will stimulate readers to reflect on how they can bring the Bible into more effective engagement with their own cultural context, for the nurture of the Church and in sharing the gospel with their neighbours.

We are grateful, under God, to all those who have helped us along our own journeys of studying, teaching, and preaching the Bible and writing books based upon it. These include godly parents and supportive families, generations of students in various continents, church members and convention guests, preachers in training, readers and bloggers, students in classrooms and children around meal tables. Above all, we offer our gratitude, love and honour to our aforementioned brother John Stott, whose lifetime of faithful preaching of the Bible has been an inspiration and model to us and countless thousands around the world.