**Interview 013 Pseudonym: Grace**

INTERVIEWER: Can you confirm for me that you’ve read the information that I sent and that you’re willing to go ahead with this interview?

GRACE: Yes, I read it and I’m willing to go ahead.

INTERVIEWER: Just to start off with, can you tell me a bit about your faith history?

GRACE: Sure, I grew up in a family, my parents were both Christians. So I’ve been going to church since I was a baby. My mum was my Sunday school teacher and I was very young when I believed and wanted Jesus to be my Saviour. I can still remember as I was, I don’t know, maybe six or seven years old, I’m not sure exactly. I remember sitting on my mum’s lap in my bedroom and saying, you know, I want to ask Jesus into my heart. So, em, I did that when I was very young. And, em, since then it’s really just been a journey of growing in faith. Of course, there’s been the usual moments when I’ve had questions, like as a teenager I’ve had questions. I went through a bit of a faith crisis, I suppose, about seven years ago, as well, that I just went through. You know, some people call it like the “dark night of the soul”. And I went through a difficult time then, it took me a few years to come through. It’s not that I ever stopped going to church or stopped reading my Bible, but it was very difficult.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me a bit about what kind of things you found difficult, or what you questioned?

GRACE: Yeah, sure. I mean, the reason that I came to that…. In my teenage years it was more the typical teenage “is there really a God?” What science says, that kind of stuff. But what happened those kind of seven years ago or whatever, I think that was partly to do with my studies. I was doing an MA at that point at [college]. One of the modules related around Prosperity Gospel and suffering and so on and the teacher – he really liked philosophy I think – and so the kinds of questions of course you ask in philosophy can really mess with your head. And – I’m pretty strong in my faith – but I’m also a bit of a thinker and analyser. And so I think all those like doubts that had perhaps been hidden under the surface came to the surface during that time, that time of thinking. I mean, it was also a time, I think, was that when I had just broken up with my boyfriend? Or.. You know, there might have been other things kind of going on as well. So I was just really questioning how, where is God? How does it make sense when this world just seems like such a mess? I tend to be someone that feels – how do I put it? – like, all the problems that are going on in the world, I can feel guilty that it’s almost not happening to me. Like it doesn’t seem fair. Why should other people suffer so much? And it’s easy for us to sit here and say, oh isn’t God good and he’s blessed us in so many ways. And I’m just thinking, yeah, but just look at the news! Hold on a minute! You know, this doesn’t really make sense, it doesn’t hold together. So I think it just brought me to a point of just really struggling to believe that God is really God. And the only thing I think that kind of … I hung on by a thread through that through Creation. That usually is what helps me keep going. I just can’t look at the world around me and believe that it just happened. So that kind of kept me held on by a thread. Friends were praying for me of course. I couldn’t pray myself; I couldn’t sing. I would just cry. So that was a bit hopeless. So lots of people were praying for me. And then at some point I read. I just couldn’t face going to church one evening and I just read through the whole of the book of Hebrews, randomly. Because I had in my mind that verse about ‘faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see’. And I thought, oh, I’ll read the whole book to put that in context. As you do. So I read the whole book. And God just really spoke to me through that about perseverance in trial and the reason we persevere is because of the hope we have and it’s not about this world and being full of blessing and whatever but it’s very much about the hope that we have in Christ and that’s what we’re looking to. So then hope has been my theme, really, since that time. I still can’t make sense of the world around me most of the time, but my song and my theme is looking to what’s to come. And so gradually, gradually I’ve been able to kind of grow since then and strengthen again my faith and trust God even when I can’t make sense of what’s going on.

INTERVIEWER: Who would you say have been models for you in your faith?

GRACE: Parents. Like I said, I’ve grown up in a Christian home. My mum was my Sunday school teacher. They would always read the Bible with me every evening before I went to bed. If I couldn’t fall asleep early, I would hear them reading the Bible together and praying together in their bed every evening. So I think they’ve been a great model for me, em, of faithful pursuit of God and just practising faithful reading of God’s word. And my grandparents, my mum’s parents, were also Christians and again just faithful, normal people but just very faithful. Yeah, so those have definitely been some influences. And there have been some others as well, like the former assistant pastor of my home church. He was the guy that baptised me. He led like a young people’s group. Sunday evening after church we would go down to their house. I went to a very small church growing up so there was quite a small group of young people. But he would invite us to his home each evening after church and we could have some Bible study together and hang out together. And he’s the pastor of another church now but he’s remained in contact with me and they go through difficult times with the family but his faith is unshakeable. So I think that’s been another influence through a phase in my life. As far as people I know are concerned, yeah. I’m sure there is others I could keep on listing, but… those are some of the key ones maybe.

INTERVIEWER: So how did you come to be doing what you’re doing?

GRACE: So the church that I grew up in, and that I go to now… the church that I grew up in was so small that it had to close and then we started going to the church that we go to now, which we were already going to the children’s work. Both these churches had quite a strong mission focus. And growing up I always read lots of missionary stories, biographies and that kind of stuff. Erm, and… so I always was fascinated by those sort of stories and I guess I always had a bit of thing about Africa, maybe lots of children do, I don’t know, but I certainly did. Something about the sights and the sounds and things. And I used to follow Tear Fund’s news, that was through church, but would be really struck by what I saw in that and the poverty and … So as I got older, going through secondary school, erm, when it came to choosing my options for GCSE, er, I ended up doing food science and nutrition just because it was the only option in the group that looked possibly doable or that I was interested in, even though it wouldn’t have been my first choice. But I ended up enjoying it so much I did it for A Level. And around the same time, I was starting to think, hmm, maybe all this overseas mission stuff, maybe it’s not just something for me to give to; maybe I could actually do it. And I think that had probably come through various sermons or things that I’d read and it starting to impress upon my mind that maybe God was actually suggesting that I go and do this stuff. Not just earn money. So, em, anyhow, I decided to apply for university to study public health nutrition, with the idea that maybe I could use that in a kind of humanitarian, or working with Tear Fund, or some other organisation like that. So to help people in poverty. And I deferred my entry and I went to [country 1] for six months. And I did that with [mission organisation 1]. Not because I was particularly keen to go with [mission organisation 1] but because I contacted several organisations saying I want to work in Africa, rural Africa, work with children, because I know that I can do that. And [organisation 1] was the one that came back to me saying, well there’s this family that need a home-schooler for their children, working in a village in [country 1], so is that something you’d be interested in? So that’s what I did. And then, while I was there… I mean, it had its challenges for sure. But I think it also confirmed to me that this was something that God wanted me to do, to work overseas and potentially in Africa. So, came back from that and went to university. And I’d spoken to some different mission organisations saying, you know, what do you look for in someone? And they said, we’d encourage you to get a couple of years normal work experience first and then a couple of years at Bible college and then think about it. So I did that, because I’m an obedient little girl. So I did my university studies, I worked for two years in [city] as a nutritionist with the NHS, involved in a community health project. And I stayed at my parents during that time, so I was strengthening the relationship with my sending – what would be my sending – church. And then I went to [college] for two years. And while I was at [college], I think I’d already been starting to think, you know, I’m not sure I want to do this nutrition stuff for the rest of my life, I’m not sure if this is what I want to be doing overseas. And when I was at [college] I had to do a placement, and so I did a couple of months in [country 1] again, this time with [organisation 2]. And I was training Sunday school teachers. And I absolutely loved it. And I think always, through all the different, you know, my job, and all … the bit that I always really enjoy is teaching and training people. So I thought, ah, this is more like what I want to do. Now, I’d actually had a lot of links with [organisation 1]: my gap year experience, my church supported a [organisation 1] missionary, when I was at university, I was at [university name] and there were two [organisation 1] families in the church that I went to when I was there. So these links with [organisation1] have been there all along, but I didn’t necessarily think of [organisation 1] as being the organisation for me. But, em, when I was in my second year at [college], I somehow found out that [organisation 1] also has this Scripture engagement aspect to their work: [detail of organisation omitted]. And so, when I found out about that and realised that this was more about helping people to engage with Scripture and that can be done through teaching and training, I thought, ah, this organisation that I’ve got all these connections with, this might be where I fit in with the kind of skills that I have and what I’m interested in doing and my background in community work and so on. And so that’s when I then applied to join [organisation 1] in 2006. Did my [organisation 1] training and then went to [country 2] in 2007.

INTERVIEWER: great. So what kind of thing are you involved in? what does it look like?

GRACE: yeah, so like I said, I’m a “Scripture Engagement Consultant”. Scripture Engagement is a very broad area. It’s anything to do with making sure that the Scriptures are available to people and being used and being understood. So as you can imagine, that covers everything from producing a Bible study guide through to teaching Sunday school teachers, through to getting the Scripture available in audio format, or, you know, it can cover any of those things. So, em, in my earlier years, what I was probably most involved in was training Sunday school teachers. And I gradually developed into training people to do Bible studies. And also just generally building relationships with local churches or, we employed … the project that I am involved with is a cluster project – I think you’ve spoken to my colleague actually. And it’s a project working with like thirteen languages, so the remote workers, we have people in each language area who we call them Literacy and Scripture Engagement Co-ordinator. And, em, they’re kind of employed by our department to build relationships with the local churches, teach people how to read their language, make sure that the resources that have been produced are available in the community and so on. So our department are responsible for supervising those guys and training them. So that’s also, that’s always a big part of my work, was supervising their work from a distance, em, and all their finances and all that kind of stuff. So quite a lot of managerial and admin type of stuff as well. But then also training them, visiting them, and doing workshops with them. So in more recent years it looks more like… I co-ordinate the whole department, so there’s quite a lot of managerial and admin stuff that I have to do and I also kind of co-ordinate Scripture Engagement across the whole of [country2], so I kind of try to keep in touch with what’s going on in other projects. I’m mentoring a couple of people to kind of move onto the next level of being Scripture Engagement specialist consultant. And, er, I do a lot of teaching in Bible colleges, visiting Bible colleges and just advocating for using the local language when that’s appropriate, or using multi-lingual Bible teaching and training them to do things like Bible studies or family devotional times, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: so how did you find moving to a different culture?

GRACE: Em… in some ways it’s hard to remember that far back. You know, when you’ve been there long enough, you’re kind of like, well this is just how life is. So it’s hard to remember how it was when I first went there. I remember when I first arrived the team was quite small and the first challenge was finding somewhere to live. And em, the place that I ended up living in was this house which is a couple of miles from where the office is, and I remember thinking “oh this is beautiful” because it was a very nice house and a beautiful garden, but it seems like it’s miles from the office. And at that point no one else lived in that area from our office and I was living on my own to begin with, even though I knew that somebody would come out and be living with me later. So I remember that being a bit of a – oh I need to try to get used to this city and I come from the countryside and that was a little challenging. But I think, I think in the early days it was all quite exciting and fun. There was another girl that I shared a department with when I first arrived…. So I did four months at language school first, in a totally different place, so that had its own unique challenges, camping out. So then when I got there, even before I’d arrived I’d been asked if I could co-ordinate the Scripture Engagement department because basically there wasn’t one. And so we needed to start one. And there was another girl that had already just arrived to do it as well, but she was only going to be short-term so there was no point in asking her to co-ordinate it. So we just spent ages sitting at our desks looking at blank pieces of paper and thinking, what on earth do we do? How do we start this kind of work? So that was really challenging. And I guess there was a little bit of me that was like, oh, I left doing community nutrition work because part of the problem is it’s really hard to know how to work in a community. And now I’ve put myself right in the same situation. It’s just that it’s spiritual nutrition rather than physical nutrition. So that was, that was definitely challenging. I don’t remember having particular issues with adapting to [country-an] culture. I mean, the obvious things, like it’s frustrating when people don’t turn up on time or, you know, there’s that kind of stuff. And I’ve never gotten used to the volume that is used in churches and stuff like that – the volume of the PA system. Those things have been difficult from the beginning. Em, but generally speaking I don’t feel like I had any problems settling in. I think what is more of a challenge, and I’m sure that this is a common thing amongst missionaries, is the learning how to live in a missionary community as well and the size of the team being such that how inclusive or exclusive are you, and those kinds of dynamics. You know, you’re used to normal life where you can choose who you do stuff with because there’s such a big community of people that you’re interacting with that no-one’s going to be offended if they’re not included in something. But, when you’re in a smaller missionary community it kind of feels like it’s rude if you don’t invite everybody because there only might be one or two people that might be left out and that’s not very kind. So inclusion/exclusion thing has been a challenge I think. It was something I’d already had to learn to cope with a little bit at Bible college so I’m glad for that training if you like. But er, yeah, I think that was one of the challenges, and continues to be a challenge in some ways, but you kind of learn how to handle it better.

INTERVIEWER: How is it in team? How have you enjoyed team life? What are the ups and downs of it?

GRACE: Yeah, I think, I appreciate the sense of community that we have and we’re actually quite a large community in [city] of expats and not all from [country] or [country] so there is, you know, quite a number of other expats around. We have a couple of Bible studies that run and so I’m part of one of those so I really appreciate that community and spending time together and doing stuff together. And I really enjoy my friends there. I share a house with a British lady and we really enjoy that. I meet up to pray with another British lady and then in my Bible study group there’s a Dutch family and an American family with children, who I really enjoy spending time with and being like a surrogate auntie in some ways to their kids because I’ve got my own nieces and nephews in England and I couldn’t see them. So I’ve enjoyed all those kinds of interactions. And I’ve also got some [County-an] friends – it’s harder to build those relationships but I’ve got a couple of good [Country-an] friends that I enjoy hanging out with as well once in a while. Very different life circumstances to me, but I still enjoy being with them sometimes, visiting their homes. What I do find difficult is when those two come together. I tend to either do stuff with my expat friends or I do stuff with my [Country-an] friends, I don’t very often bring those groups together, except when you’re in the office and you’re all working together, then that’s different, a different scenario.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think helped you prepare for being in a different culture?

GRACE: [pause] I guess a whole range of things. Obviously, like I said, I’ve been reading books since my childhood about missionaries, so I guess I got some understanding back there. And I did that gap year, so that gave me another insight. I would say that my two years at All Nations was really helpful. I know that less and less people are going to Bible Colleges these days for this kind of training but I would highly recommend it to anybody. I think that was a really valuable time in understanding myself better as well as being able to think through what it might look like to work cross-culturally. So I would say that was a really valuable time. Yeah, there’s probably been the odd book here and there over the years, or just different people that I’ve interacted with when I’ve been working who’ve been able to give me insights into the culture or encourage me or whatever.

INTERVIEWER: So would you call yourself a missionary?

GRACE: Em, I tend to use the word missionary because it is a term that most people understand in churches. And it depends what mood I’m in as to whether I’m happy with it or not. So, er, there was a definitely a phase that I went through when I was like, I wouldn’t call myself a missionary because we’re all missionaries. We’re all meant to be reaching out with the good news of Jesus Christ. But then, what do you call someone like me? Then you’ve got to call them something like “cross-cultural missionary” or something that’s very long-winded, so… I’m afraid that I do tend to call myself a missionary just for ease because most people understand that a missionary is someone who’s gone to another country to tell people about God, you know. So I tend to use the term missionary quite a lot still, depending on the groups that I’m working with or talking to, or the person that I’m talking to. Sometimes I avoid using that word, I just talk more about the fact that I work in [Country]. I’m just, you know, helping people engage with Scripture in [Country], just the same as people need to do in England. So sometimes I avoid the use of the term. So I have different understandings of the word missionary. It depends on the audience I’m talking to, as what I think they understand by it. So if I think they understand a missionary as someone who goes and works cross-culturally and helps people know about God, then I’ll just use the term missionary because they know what I’m talking about and it makes sense to them. And a lot of my support base is small churches with … and so that makes sense to them. But if I’m talking to someone perhaps my own age, or someone who themselves is a missionary I might not use the term missionary. I might use more – because we both think, we don’t think we’re any more worthy than anyone who’s serving their home community and doing mission in their home community. So I tend to give it a different meaning depending on who I’m talking to.

INTERVIEWER: That’s a good answer! Tell me about support then - all different aspects of support – what does that look like?

GRACE: I guess the first thing that comes to mind when someone talks about support is financial support. But when I talk about support with people I always talk about it in terms of prayer support as well as financial support. And just the support of being in touch with me and correspondence and maintaining communication. So yeah, support has more than just the meaning of finance for sure. And there’s a number of churches that support me but don’t necessarily give financially or there might be a one-off gift here and there, but I know that they pray for me regularly in their prayer meetings and they would always want me to come and visit when I come home and I really appreciate that. I am very thankful that actually support has been very – financial support has been very easy for me to raise. I have a good support base and my home church is a great blessing to me. Even though it’s a very small church, but they give very generously. So that’s – I’m not one of those people who have to put in their newsletter every single time “if you’d like to consider supporting me…” you know, “being part of my support base…” or “part of my partnership team” or whatever they want to call it, you know, “this is what you need to do.” I always delete that bit of my newsletter because, yeah, I’m just very blessed in that.

INTERVIEWER: How do you go about making big decisions?

GRACE: [Laughing] I’m rubbish at decision making! It’s like one of the things that I find so hard! Big and small. So like, at the small level, I’m the person who can go to a restaurant and look at the menu and cry because I can’t decide what to eat.

INTERVIEWER: I often say that I’ve used up all my decision-making on the big ones and so when someone says “tea or coffee?” I just don’t know!

GRACE: Yeah! It frequently happens in our house. My house mate is like, “I’m going to put the kettle on, do you want any hot water for a drink?” And I’ll be like: “erm…..” [Laughing] Making decisions though. Big decisions. It depends on the nature of the decision of course. I mentioned before that I’m a bit of thinker and an analyser, so I don’t make snap decisions, or very rarely. I’m someone that’s going to mull it over for quite a long time. And that’s part of the reason why I find it so hard to make. Because I’ll always look at both sides and then I can’t decide which one is the best option because I see the pros and cons on both sides for everything. So I tend to talk it through with people, so I can argue both sides on the point. So I can come to the end and still not really be sure which way I want to go.

INTERVIEWER: Who would you talk to?

GRACE: Sometimes it’s my mum. Sometimes it would be a friend. But I’m not necessarily – I don’t necessarily – I’m not sure if I’d say I process it with them. That might be part of the overall processing but I’ve already thought about it before I talk to them, but I might want to hear their input. Sometimes when they say, well it sounds like you want to do this, I’m like “no I don’t, I want to do this” and that makes me realise. And obviously I would pray about it. But I wouldn’t say that I’m very good at hearing what God has to say about things. So I tend to feel like it’s more that He just kind of confirms in my spirit gradually that this seems to be the right way for me to go. So, em, no decision is ever easy for me. I would say it’s generally a gradual process. It’s often something I’ve been thinking about for a while, I’ve been mulling it over in my mind. In some ways I might even know the answer before I start talking about it with other people, and looking at all sides of it. I have been known to get out a piece of paper and write down all the pros and cons for everything. But that doesn’t necessarily help me because I’d end up still choosing something different or not be clear. Yeah. And so, it’s just a very gradual process. Yeah. I don’t know.

INTERVIEWER: So do you have plans for the future?

GRACE: That’s touching on a sensitive topic because I have no idea! And that’s part of the problem. I, I’ve kind of got to the point in my work where I’m a bit tired of what I’m doing. I don’t, you know, because I co-ordinate the whole department and do quite a lot of managerial stuff. I don’t mind some of that stuff, but I do need the stuff that energises me some of the time, like the teaching and the training. And I’ve been doing a reasonable amount of teaching and training in the Bible colleges. But I’ve been teaching exactly the same material in every single college and I repeat it each year. So I have taught people how to do Bible studies five times a year for the past three years, or something. I’m getting tired of this. I miss the creativity aspect of teaching as well. So I’d already started to talk a little bit with my supervisor – you know, is it possible for me to do something a little bit different and still stay with [organisation]? And they’re like, yes, ok, we’re open to that. Helping people, teaching people the Bible is still part of Scripture Engagement. So we’re ok with doing that but we’ll talk about it with you. So, I was kind of, it’s been mulling over in the back of my mind for a couple of years that I’m not content in my situation in the same way that I used to be. But, being, seen as decision making is hard for me and I tend to have a sense of responsibility in wanting to see a job done well, I wasn’t going to just quit what I was doing, I wasn’t sure what else there is for me anyhow. Even if I have an idea that I would like to be doing more of this, I don’t know how to make that idea work, how to make it happen. When something gets started I can roll with it, but I find that move difficult. And so I’ve just delayed things and there’s always been lots to do anyhow in my department. And so long as I’m busy, I can be fairly content anyhow, it’s only if I’m not quite busy enough that these thoughts really take over. So em, I’d hoped to go to {other country] in May to see how another organisation does some Bible teaching, and then that had to be cancelled because they changed the dates and not of course with coronavirus it hasn’t happened anyhow. So I kind of, I was reaching a point where I was wanting to try and really investigate a bit more some different ideas, and that’s sort of been wiped away from me at the moment. And now I’m back in England and, em, not quite sure – like my whole job – all the stuff that keeps me busy as well is going to gradually disappear because I can’t do that much from a distance. And so I feel like it’s very in my face now and I’m not quite sure how to move on from here. But I’m not quite sure what the options are exactly. I can’t do my usually kind of analytical, well this is how I need to do it, you know. It’s like, I’m just not quite sure what is next. I kind of have this idea of what I want to do, but I’m not quite sure how to make that happen. Or maybe God’s got a different plan altogether. I just don’t really know where I’m going with any of that at the moment. So, I think, you know, for now, I would go back to [country] after all this is over. I would need to hand stuff over properly anyhow to my local colleagues if I was to do anything different. But how long I would stay in [country] I don’t know. My work permit expires in January next year and at the moment we never know whether it’s going to be renewed or not, because it’s really uncertain in [country] these days. So, em, there’s a lot of unknowns in the next twelve months.

INTERVIEWER: So how are you feeling about this whole strange situation?

GRACE: Yeah, it is quite unsettling I guess. I … I don’t know quite what’s going to happen through it. The thing is, even if I’d been in [country] and none of this coronavirus stuff had happened, I was still in that place of wondering what’s next. And… I wasn’t sure how to figure that out. But was wanting to figure it out because I knew that I was not going to be content in my current role for too much longer. So the coronavirus issue has just kind of thrown everything up into the air I guess. You know, we were forced to evacuate and had to leave my team behind at very short notice. You know we were told on Thursday afternoon we need to leave and then on Saturday morning I was in a car driving off to the airport. So it all happened very suddenly. And all the bits of my job that I enjoy doing the most – the teaching and the training – have now been taken away. I can’t do that from here, obviously. I can do a little bit of my department via Zoom maybe, but if the office shuts then that will stop as well. And so I’ll just be reduced to a few bits of admin and managerial stuff and one or two other bits that I’d never got round to doing. So it might be forcing me into a time of really analysing what’s next and thinking about what’s next and seeing what God might want to show me through this time. But at the moment I really don’t know what that looks like. I don’t know whether God’s shutting the door on me doing this Bible teaching or whether this was just a, you know, it’s just world circumstances and I shouldn’t take that as being something from God, you know. Or whether God’s going to bring me into touch with someone else, or show me a different way. Or whether he does want me to just carry on being faithful in this particular role for a while. I really couldn’t say at the moment, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: How do you feel about being single in missions?

GRACE: Yeah, I think when I first came out it wasn’t an issue for me. I didn’t think about it. I mean I was 27 when I came to [country]. And I don’t think the fact that I was single was on the agenda really. I mean sure, I wanted to be married, but it wasn’t like I was worried about it, you know. Then… so I was in [country] for five years and I, when I hit thirty I think I had a bit more of a crisis of “oh no, I’m thirty and I’m still single, oh no! And there’s no chance of me meeting anybody here” because our team was full of single ladies and there’s no single guys. So, em, I came back to the UK after five years to do an MA because I knew that that was something that was always in the back of my mind for my professional development, but em, it was also partly so that I could be back in the UK in a context where I would have the chance of meeting somebody and just give that a chance. So, I, you know, I thought well a Bible college context, that’s a good place for meeting people maybe. Like-minded people. I decided to join Christian Connections, dating agency online. And so on. And I did meet somebody through that, we were going out for a while, but then ended that. And that was a bad time and a crisis of faith, tough. So after two and a half years in the UK, I thought, no, I might as well go back. So I went back to [country] and I’ve been pretty content since then. I think I felt like I’d given it a good go. I’d tried to put myself in a place where I could meet people and it hadn’t happened and now I could get on with life and em…. While I’d been at Bible college we’d had, there was a day, like a singles’ day. There’s a lady called [name] I don’t know if you know her and [name]… so the two of them led this day. So he obviously spent more time with the guys, she spent more time with the girls. Both single people who have been missionaries or work cross-culturally full-time Christian ministry, whatever you want to call it. And em, and one of the things I remember her saying, that she had actually been engaged to be married and had chosen to end the engagement because she knew that if she carried on with that she would not be able to go and work in [Asian country] which was where her heart was. And she knew that she’d have lots of great ministry opportunities in the UK with her husband, but she had to choose. Either choice was going to mean there was going to be loss. And she had to choose which things to lose. And that really struck me about the fact that it can be both a positive choice – rather than saying oh I’m single just because you know I can’t find somebody, you can also see it as a positive choice to say, well I’m single because I’ve chosen this life and actually would I even want to give that up if there was an opportunity? And so I think that helped me to look at what I’m doing more positively as a positive choice to do that, even that means forfeiting the opportunity to be in a relationship. And that doesn’t mean that the desire to be married has ever gone, but it has helped me to be more content in what I’ve chosen to do. And there’s a lot of really good things about my life there, you know. A lot of other friends and single missionary friends and other friends, and freedom to do what I want to do. I don’t think I could do what I do if I was married, especially if I had children. So, yeah… I think, you know…. I’m turning 40 next week like I said… so again, it’s a bit of a “oh I’m turning 40 now”, you know, all chances of having children are totally gone and … I think each time there’s a new decade there’s a new sense of “oh dear”. But in balance, I would say that I am fairly content.

INTERVIEWER: well happy birthday! It’s going to be an interesting one. [referring to lockdown]

[discussion about lockdown Zoom birthdays omitted]

GRACE: yeah, quite.

INTERVIEWER: My last question really is how and how much do you use social media?

GRACE: I use facebook and whatsapp primarily. So, Facebook – I post on it occasionally. My general thinking in my head when I post stuff is I’m doing this to – sometimes it’s just to share something fun that I’ve enjoyed, sometimes it’s slightly trying to inform people about what my life is like in [country] or when I’m back in the UK or whatever. But, yeah, I’m a sporadic contributor to Facebook. And I definitely go on Facebook every day, just for a couple of minutes just to see what’s going on. I’m not someone that spends hours on Facebook. I can’t be bothered with it. So I use it as a way to communicate a little bit about my life. I use it as a way to keep up with what’s going on in other people’s lives who are not very good at communicating. And I also use it within our own community, you know. Even though you’re friends and we see each other quite often, it’s also, you learn more about each other from what they post day by day, especially maybe the families because I only get to see them maybe once or twice during the week and then I can see some of the other stuff that’s going on in their day to day life. So it’s about the community that I’m already present and current with but then also about keeping in touch with and informing the community back in the UK. Or vice versa if I’m in the UK. And I don’t use it much to engage with my [Country-an] colleagues although some of them are friends with me on Facebook. But I feel a bit more cautious about who I make friends with outside of the expat community, but there’s a number of my friends from there as well. And then I use Whatsapp – I don’t know … it’s not 100% social media, is it, because it’s not public. But I use it a lot. We have a Whatsapp family group so that’s a real blessing to keep in contact with the family and it’s my main way of contacting people all over the world – I use it all the time. I’m not on anything else. I’m not on Instagram. I was on Twitter for a while but then I stopped doing it. So I’m not a huge social media user really. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Great. Well I think that’s all I wanted to ask you about. Thank you for your time.

GRACE: You’re welcome. …