**Interview 007 Pseudonym: Philip**

*[Numerous interruptions, including call cutting out completely at one point]*

INTERVIEWER: Great. So can you confirm for me that you’ve read the information that I sent and that you are willing to take part in this interview?

PHILIP: I can confirm that, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Great, thank you. Just to start off, can you tell me about your faith history?

PHILIP: Yes, we… I was raised in a Catholic home… sorry about that [curtain blows across face]. I was raised in a Catholic home so very kind of dutiful, going to church regularly, very kind of legalistic practices. And I actually went to a Catholic primary school and a Catholic secondary school. So kind of had that, you know, indoctrinated into me. And it was when I was 18, my dad was diagnosed with cancer, and that really caused me to start questioning my faith rather than just go along with what I’d always been brought up as… and em… and so I ended up doing an Alpha Course and got saved on an Alpha course.

INTERVIEWER: Was that as a teenager?

PHILIP: I was 18. So I got saved at 18, well I met Jesus for the first time at 18. (Ah, here’s my daughter…)

So I met Jesus at 18 on the Alpha course, but then my dad died and it threw me into a spin and I ran away from God really for about a year. And then when I was 19 I kind of came back to church. I’d say 19 is when I got born again. At 18 on Alpha I encountered God for the first time, that’s the way I’ve pieced it together in my mind so… So I’m 35 now.

INTERVIEWER: So what brought you back at that time?

PHILIP: Erm, some friends. I was good friends with a family who were [church]–going family. And they invited – they’d been helping me out throughout the past year from my dad’s death to where I was. And they just invited me for Sunday lunch. And they lived in the middle of nowhere and I didn’t have a car. And they said, ‘ah [name], we’re going to go to London this afternoon, to a church, do you want to come?’ And I couldn’t really say no because I had nowhere else to go. I always say they kidnapped me and took me to Hillsong. And I went to Hillsong and just met…. You know, physically encountered God for the first time. And then the Sunday afterwards, because that was on Saturday night, I went to [Town name] Community Church, which is [location] and yeah, there was a visiting prophet and I met God in a real big way and was baptised in the Spirit… so yes.

INTERVIEWER: So how did you get from there to where you are now?

PHILIP: Oh gosh, yeah. (Let’s just sort this curtain out – sorry!) Well, I’m assuming you don’t mind long answers?

INTERVIEWER: no, no, that’s fine!

PHILIP: yeah yeah. So from that moment. I was in the police force. I joined the police force at 18 and I worked as a police officer for seven years. And after about six years of being in the police I married my wife [name]. Leading up to getting married we both had this kind of real desire for mission just in us, in our hearts. We always wanted to kind of go and do something. She’s from south London, but I’m from [town name], which is a very small white middle class town. So I’d always kind of known that there was something more to be explored in the world. I don’t necessarily think she had the same idea, the same concept, because she grew up in south London. But I think growing up in south London showed her the vastness of diversity and of the world. And so we … I had actually spent some time in [African country A] with [leader of a church network] and I’d done like a three-month internship with him. [Wife’s name] had been to [African Country B] and spent some time with [leader’s name]. So we always actually thought Africa was where we’d end up. And em, got married, you know, spent a year just settling into married life. And then, after about a year I left the police and I joined the church full-time and I became their full-time youth worker. And around that time we were sort of talking about, ‘ah, should we take a vacation – a holiday, sorry – whilst we’re transitioning…?’ And we made a list as newly-weds do of all the places in the world you want to go and all the places you don’t want to go. So we made a list of Italy, Rome, all these wonderful places. And on the list of places we didn’t want to go, [Country C] was like flat bottom. Like we never wanted to set foot in [Country C]. And, em, so that was that. And then I joined the church and on my first day working for the church I went down to [city] for some leadership training, did like a year-long course there. And it was like a weekly residential thing you’d do every two months, whatever. And, er, I had a dream on my first evening of being employed as the youth worker. And in the dream, er, God essentially spoke to us about moving to [Country C] to be part of a church-planting movement. And I woke up from the dream and I was sweating, I was crying. I felt like God’s hand was on my chest and I couldn’t move. And I still remember today, tears in my eyes, I reached over to my phone to text [wife’s name] to say ‘I just had a dream, God’s spoken.’ And the amazing thing for me is that overnight my heart towards [Country C] changed. But more importantly, [wife’s name]’s heart changed. So for me looking back I realise that is a real sign of God because she hated [Country C] – in fact, her parents absolutely detest [Country C], like it’s the worst place in the world. They’re real lefty liberals, they hate guns, they’re not Christians, they really have never ever wanted to come here. And that might be partly where [wife]’s attitude towards [Country C] came from. But for us it was like – for her overnight she was like, yeah, I think this is right, this is what God’s calling us to do. So then we spent… we visited… we just picked [city] because we thought if this is God we’ll just go to the first place. So we went to [city], em, just loved it. Spent a week here. I mean, I don’t think anyone’s ever come to [city] and not loved it. But we loved it. We felt very safe. And then we continued to sort of plan trips. We actually booked tickets to [other city], because we had a friend there. And we thought maybe it’s [other city] that God’s calling us to, because at this stage it was just “[Country C]”, that was all the kind of confirmation we had. Em, and [wife] was pregnant with our first child, and about two weeks before we were going to fly we went to have a scan and they said ‘you’re placenta’s too low, if you fly you will haemorrhage, our recommendation is you don’t fly.’ And we, obviously, I think we were about five months in our something. I think six months is like when you should stop flying. And we were still in that time period. So we were really shocked. And so cancelled our trip; Virgin refunded our flights because it was medical advice. Birth came, placenta was in the perfect position. We always look back at that and really felt God say to us it’s because he didn’t want us to explore [other city]. He wasn’t calling us to [other city]. So fast forward a bit. We took another trip, stayed here for two weeks, loved it. Fast forward to I guess … so I joined the church in 2009… fast forward to like 2015… 14/15. We’d been having trips there, we’d been watching all [Country C-an] shows, buying all the [Country C-an], you know, “I love [city]” T-shirts. Just falling, reading about it… falling in love with Country C from a distance. And then talking to people. And then I had, em, er, I was doing leadership training advanced in [area of London] now. And I had a contact who was planting a church in [area of Country C]. A guy called [name]. And he was on a Skype church-planting training with an American guy called [name], who was from [area] and who was planting in [city] or was planning to. So he came – we touched base via Skype. Or did we touch base via Skype? I can’t even remember. I think we visited and we met him for lunch. So he bussed into [city], like a five hour bus journey to meet us for a two-hour lunch. And we walked away from that lunch thinking he’s a really nice guy, I wonder what God will do with that.

And then about a year later I had another prophetic dream. I don’t know if this is making sense. I feel like I’m …

INTERVIEWER: no, no, it’s good

PHILIP: And then, and then we had another prophetic dream. And in the prophetic dream I, em, I was standing at the front of my church in [town]. We were kind of getting to a stage in ourselves like we were ready to go. So we were kind of saying to God “whenever you call us.” So I had a dream… and in the dream I was standing at the front of our church with [name] who was our lead elder and I was announcing to the church: “church, we are leaving, we are moving to [Country C] to join [names] to plant churches in [city] June 2016.” And I woke up and I didn’t think anything of it. I thought, that’s just me processing. That’s just me: I want to be there. That’d be nice. Plus we had no way of getting there. So for me it was all a bit like, that doesn’t make any sense. Anyway, later that same day we Skyped [name of church-planting couple in Country C city]. We had been skyping them during the day sometimes for the kids to chat on Skype and get to know each other a bit more. And we Skyped them and it was about 10 o’clock in the morning for us, so a couple of hours after my dream and… or that I’d woken up… And we were like ‘how you guys doing?’ And she said, ‘ah we’re doing really well. Last night we had a prayer meeting for [city] and we…’ and she said ‘…we prayed specifically for you guys that you would have strategic insights to know how and when to get to [city] to join us.’ At which point I was like, what time were you praying? And they said, ‘well we were praying at like 8 o’clock in the evening’ which with the time difference would have been like 2 or 3 o’clock for us. And it suddenly hit me and I had one of those moments where it’s almost like I audibly heard God say, ‘yep, told you!’ And I literally went white as a sheet and I walked out of the house without saying anything. And I just, I was speechless. I even get emotional about it now. It was one of those moments where I just feel like, you have a moment where you’re like ‘wow, God, you’re really real!’ And he just said ‘yeah.’ And so … so we really felt like that was God calling us to start pushing doors to start moving. So I shared it with the eldership team. I was kind of on the elders’ team at that time. And they felt like, having shared the journey, yeah, we feel like God’s speaking here, let us help you make this work. So we started apply for, started to do some training. I never went to college, university. Left school, went straight into the police force, so never had really any qualifications and then joined the church, so…. We were trying to figure out how to get here. And, em, I had the idea, well not the idea… but I was at the stage… I’d just finished playing soccer, football, sort of fairly high amateur level. And I decided I wanted to sort of start training to become a coach. At which point I, er, thought well why don’t I do some UK soccer qualifications, try and apply for some soccer jobs. Now, that journey was probably about a year and a half journey, or a year journey of getting the qualifications that I thought would get me a job. And probably cost us, I don’t know, three or four thousand pounds to do. So we were very apprehensive about it. Is this the right thing? Is this going to help? And I went to a church-planting conference in [Country C] and [name] prophesied over me “God is training you up; there’s purpose in the skill; he’s developing your resume: go for it” basically. Which gave us a huge amount of confidence that soccer was a way in. So we went with it. I started to do my qualifications and got those qualifications. And, em, started applying for jobs. And kept getting “no’s”. Everyone said no, we don’t want you. It wasn’t because of the qualification, it was because of the visa. And so we, anyway, we got to a stage in about April 2016 and we’re like, well God’s said June 2016, so what do we do? So I had coffee with [name of leader also known to me], which is always a bad idea. We were outside [town] football stadium. I said, “we’re pushing all these doors, nothing’s opening, but God has said we should go… we’re moving to [Country C] in June… I’m more convinced of that than anything.” So he said, “well just go then. What are you waiting for? Just go!” And I said, “well I haven’t got a job.” And he said, “Well, if God’s called you to go, just go!” And, em, so I walked away and we said, yeah, that’s the right thing to do. And I remember talking to a friend and he says, “the apostolic.. the apostle always brings comfort to the pioneer.” And it was like the most ridiculous advice you could ever give: move to [Country C], the most expensive, one of the most expensive cities in the world, without a job, and trust in God. But we felt a strange comfort. So we signed … we had a lease for a house, we reneged on that. We said we’re going to move out. Moved in with [wife]’s parents. And we applied for a tourist visa. And the church took some offerings for us. I think we raised about £40 000. And we got granted a tourist visa and we moved out in October 2016. With the idea that we’d move here and we’d find a job. So we landed here, rented an apartment, settled in. Started working with [local couple]. We hadn’t spent a huge amount of time with them in person but we’d really connected with them. Really saw how our gifts as a four [names] really complemented each other. And they’d been having a really tough time gathering a team, as well. You know, [city] is just such a city where people want to, it’s glamourous but it’s really hard as well. It’s smelly, it’s expensive, it’s overcrowded. And it’s a tough mission. So people were coming and then leaving after about a year or so. So they’d really struggled. They were just on their own and needed help. So we came along and really felt like a real God connection there. Again I applied for jobs. Got offered a whole bunch of jobs but didn’t get offered the visa, based on my qualifications. So after about five months we have a decision to make. What do we do? We’ve tried. We’ve moved out here. At which point [neo-charismatic church network] church in [region of Country C] said, well we’ve been watching – I mean they oversee us, so they’d been really hands on – and they said “we really feel like God’s in this and that you and [names] you guys function really well together, so we want to help make it happen. So they offered us a religious visa. So after six months of being in the States we actually moved back to the UK for six more months and stayed with [wife]’s parents. And then in November 2017, visas approved, we moved back out here full-time. So we moved continents three times in twelve months and moved, you know, lived in something like twenty different houses over that period of time. It was one of the worst years of our life but it GOT US HERE! That’s the short version. So yeah.

INTERVIEWER: wow. So what are you actually doing now?

PHILIP: so, we’ve been here for two and a half years now. Full-time. We’ve just applied for an extension to our visa. So my, I’m here full-time on a religious visa, so I can only legally be employed by the church. And so my time is, is spent in many different ways. Right now it’s all over the place, obviously, because of Corona. But rewind a year ago. I was kind of administrating the church. It’s one of my strengths; [name] is not very good at that. So all the communications aspects, social media, em, all of that I was overseeing. Regular emails, contact with people. I’ve overseen the process of us getting em – I forget what you call it in the UK – but charitable status. So yeah, we’ve become a non-profit organisation here. I’ve put all the policies together, all the procedures. Did all the finances, connected with our bookkeeper. All those kind of things. So a lot of admin. I’m preaching – [name] and I probably share the preaching, well we probably do about 30% each and then we have other people. Our wives both preach and we have some other people preaching as well. Regularly preaching here; hosting prayer meetings… stuff like that. General stuff, pastoral care. And then on top of that I’m doing some regional stuff because I’m actually employed by the church in [region] so I preach up there once a month. And I’m involved with mobilising, like the twenties, so I’ve done some stuff for that. And… I’m discipling a whole bunch of guys up in [region] as well. A lot of that is remotely, or they come down and spend a weekend with us and stuff. And then on top of that I’m actually volunteer soccer-coaching. Semi-pro club here that I’m working with. That actually takes up a lot of my time but we’ve, because of the way my time is scheduled, we’ve allowed specific 10-15 hours a week to go towards soccer coaching in order to help me make contacts in the community and build up kind of connections in the soccer world because the plan will be for us to apply for a green card, and then for me to go bi-vocational and work part-time soccer, part-time church, so…. Yup.

INTERVIEWER: So, who would you say have been your models in faith?

CONNECTION LOST … TRIED AGAIN

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

PHILIP: In terms of people I know or anyone?

INTERVIEWER: any

PHILIP: So I think… so people who’ve really inspired me would be … erm… I think George Mueller had a big influence on me. I think his, specifically to do with his faith when it comes to finance and, em, you know, he would never ask anyone for money, he would just pray. And that kind of living by faith really inspired me. Partly helped us to move here I think. Moving here for six months on a tourist visa with just, you know… I think Hudson Taylor, he was actually inspired by Mueller, I think that’s the way round it was. So he’s another guy I’ve read a lot of and just loved his story of cross-cultural mission. In terms of personal, em, influences, I mean [Name]: he really fathered me in the faith in many ways. From when I first kind of got saved really. I ended up just loitering around his house a lot. I came from a non-Christian home and he had two daughters who were very nice… so I spent a lot of time there when I was a young Christian. But then he obviously then became my boss and employed me and we spent six years working together and… em… The thing is with, you know, like… I always think about this with parents and spiritual parents it’s true as well I think. With your parents you see stuff you like and see stuff you don’t like. So no criticism to [name] but there’s a whole load of stuff I loved about [name]; there’s a few things I was like ‘I don’t want to be like that.’ So, positive and negative influence. He’s probably had the most influential, er, shaping of my life. Then I think [church network] leaders from afar. [Name] is someone I always go to and have such respect for. The two years leadership training – always so impressed with the way he works and the way he communicates. And I would probably say [Name] has probably been the other guy who’s shaped me most by his preaching. So… That’s four or five people.

INTERVIEWER: Do you consider yourself a ‘missionary’? And how would you define the term.

PHILIP: [smiling] That’s a great question. I think… We’ve struggled with this because we do see ourselves as missionaries but, er, so we’ve got friends who live in [Asian country] and we’ve got other friends in [Asia] who’re working with Buddhists. And I think when people move to the East, it’s very, ‘oh they’re missionaries’ you know. It’s easy to call them. But if, when people move from one culture to [city], I think it can be very easy for … Well our perception, I don’t know if this is true, but we feel like we have to convince people that we’re missionaries and, you know, pray for us and … because it’s hard for us as well. So we would see…. I mean I think missionary is a ‘sent one’ – someone who’s sent by God. We’re here not because we like it; we’re here… we do like it, but we’re here because God told us to come. So, that’s for me how I would define a missionary. So yes.

INTERVIEWER: OK. Have you faced challenges in your faith? Like you mentioned right at the beginning with your dad. Have there been other things that have challenged your faith, or caused you to kind of think about it?

PHILIP: not in relation to [city] but just in general?

INTERVIEWER: yeah

PHILIP: I mean, yeah. Yeah for sure. I think most of my struggles have probably come down to a place of suffering. So my dad died: that was a big one, something I’ve always struggled with. And spent a long time processing. I got saved fairly young, like in my twenties. When I was thirty I ended up going through depression. I was diagnosed with clinical depression. My second – my daughter – my second child had just been born and my wife had post-natal depression. And after she had kind of recovered and got better, I crashed. And that was a mixture of all sorts of things, but a lot to do with my dad. I mean, my dad died [when I was] 18, but he was quite absent really. Not in an intentional way but in, you know, emotionally he was just of that generation. Worked 7am to sort of 8pm every Monday to Friday. So I didn’t see him a lot during the week. And on weekends he’d play golf. So, I did… when he died, it caused me to think, did I really have a connection with him? And stuff like that. So when I was thirty I went through depression and spent six months in therapy in counselling. And that was, you know, definitely, going through depression’s a very very challenging time. I would say when I was 18, so before I really got saved, after my dad died, and when I was thirty definitely struggled with suicidal thoughts and things like that. Not that I think I ever would have acted on it but just the desire for things to be over. So yeah, but I think a lot of it stems down to suffering and, you know, childhood trauma, or dad dying, stuff like that.

INTERVIEWER: How have you found living in a different culture?

PHILIP: Yeah, it’s crazy. I mean again it comes down a little bit down to the question about missionaries. I think, em, we really suffered with culture shock when moving here. And the idea of us saying that is, people don’t really understand it. So my mum, for example, hasn’t really understood what we’ve meant and how we can have culture shock when we speak the same language and when it’s the West.

INTERVIEWER: more or less the same language!

PHILIP: yeah. I had dinner with [name]. He was over here for a conference and I was telling him all the different things and it’s not just language, there’s so many things that they do differently. But for me the culture shock is there’s all this stuff on the surface like how they say water and they’re pants not trousers. There’s all those surface level things but then underneath it there’s a values difference and the values of [Country C] are just vastly vastly different from England. And, you know, that’s obvious but when you think about it of course it’s obvious. Look how their country was founded. Look how old they are. Look at their motto. …. But I think when you’re watching TV shows and watching Country C-an sport or visiting for vacation, for holiday, you don’t really think about that. So when we moved here, we didn’t really have any cross-cultural training. The only training I’ve had cross-culturally was Andy McCullough’s book “Global Humility” and I read that whilst here. Yeah, so we definitely experienced culture shock in many ways. So yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think there was anything that kind of prepared you for it before you went?

PHILIP: Well either we weren’t looking or it wasn’t offered. But I don’t think we were prepared at all. That was part of the issue I think why it hit us so much, because we didn’t expect it. And if someone had kind of, you know, when I hear of people moving to the [Country C] now I want to talk to them and say, hey, just be aware of things. You know, if we go with eyes wide open, then you can kind of expect the shock. I mean it’s silly things like, erm, the way that you interact with an Country C-an. So I remember a guy who was from [Country C] and he moved to England. And he told me, gave me an amazing analogy that’s really helped us. He said, “Country C-ans are like peaches: you touch them, they’re very warm, they’re very soft, they’re very friendly. But to get in and know them, they’re like a nut: it’s really hard to get into like the inner circle of an Country C-an. But they’re very warm, very friendly. Whereas Brits are like coconuts. They’re very hard on the outside; very like woah, standoffish, but as soon as you crack the shell, they’re like this warm beautiful juicy person.” And that has like rung true in so many situations. And even to the point of our time with [US couple] who we’d moved here to support and to be with and to serve alongside. We’re on team together. We’re really close friends. But to try and get into their hearts and really know them has been a challenge. I mean I think we’re in a good place now, two and a half years down the line. But initially there was a lot of bumping heads, clashing heads, stuff like that, so…. So yeah, that was the issue for us, was I don’t think we were prepared.

INTERVIEWER: How do you go about taking major decisions?

PHILIP: As a couple, as a family?

INTERVIEWER: yeah

PHILIP: We, I mean… that’s a great question… I think it’s evolving all the time. I think we’re always looking for ‘what’s God saying?’ [wife] is very very prophetic, hears God’s voice very clearly and just has an amazing gut, like gut instinct. We’re really led by that, by the prophetic and over the course of our calling here we’ve had so many prophetic words. [Name] picked out [wife] at a conference and said “I feel like God’s calling you to [Country C] to plant churches” and prophesied a whole load of amazing stuff over her and … So we’re always looking for that. We also, linked to that I guess, we’ve always felt called to be where we are. So even when we got married, we were going to move to [area of UK] where [wife] was studying and I was actually going to do an undergraduate degree, got an unconditional offer at [town] and, but we felt God speak to us specifically and call us to stay at [town]. And so, em, so we stayed there and we said ‘we’re going to stay here until he calls us out.’ And so he did that, obviously, calling us to [Country C]. Now we will stay in [city] until he calls us out. And so the prophetic is so key for us. In terms of other decisions where maybe the prophetic isn’t prevalent, we will… a phrase that we’ve kind of, it’s mainly since being here actually, on this journey, that we’ve really sunken into is “where’s your peace?” And in Luke 1, John the Baptist prophesies about Jesus being – or is it Zachariah? – he says Jesus will be “led by peace.” And it’s something we’ve very much felt God speak to us about. And so now if we have a decision and there’s no prophetic coming, we will say to each other, well what do you feel most peaceful about. So that’s just to do with our own connection with God and how we’re processing stuff, so… I’d say probably they’re the two biggest things? Obviously we talk stuff through till the cows come home. [wife] and I love to talk about big decisions like that, so, yeah. So prophetic, peace, and talking about it.

INTERVIEWER: you said there you expect to stay just until you hear otherwise from God – do you have any ideas how long you’re there or is it just…?

PHILIP: we, I think, I mean we’d like to live here forever. You know, right now we have no desire to go anywhere else. We really feel like it’s where God’s called us. That’s one of the things when people ask us how do you find it. Our response is, well we feel we’re where God’s called us to be. So if, you know, if it was Timbuktu or Newcastle or Cornwall, for us it wouldn’t matter where it was so long as it’s where we feel God’s called us to be. So for us, er, we don’t envisage going anywhere else until God tells us to do so. But obviously the other element of it is that we are bound by the government here and finances and green cards. We’ve just applied for an extension to our visa. So it was a two-and-a-half year extension, it ran out in February… it’s a five year visa but they gave us two-and-a-half years, ran out in February, so we’ve just sent off application for the other two-and-a-half years. But if we can raise funds we’ll apply for a green card which we can do any time now, it’s just about cost. And if that’s approved, then that’s our goal is to get a green card and then like I said work bi-vocationally and then, em, probably look to plant from here somewhere else in [name] area.

But we don’t really make, you know, here’s our retirement plan: we want to move here, do that, and then when we’re fifty move to [region]!

INTERVIEWER: What about thinking about your children, do you want them to grow up there? How do you see that working out?

PHILIP: Yeah, well we’ve got three kids: [name] is 8, [name] is 6 and we’ve just had [name] who’s five months, so she’s an Country C-an citizen, she was born here. So there’s that. We’re not… I mean, again, we probably live by the principle that if God’s called us somewhere then he’s called our kids, like, we’ve walked this journey with them as well. Like when we first moved here our son was five, so he’s still, he’d made really good friends in the UK, there’s still one friend he Skypes, texts on our phones, you know, still has a real affinity to him. He’s a massive [UK football club] fan; so we love football, soccer, so we’ll watch a lot of the premier league. So he’s still got like a love for England. And that’s great. We want them to know that they are English and have that in them, but, we just know that if God’s called us he’s called our family. So we’re very peaceful about that. The other thing is that we home-educate so for us moving around isn’t actually as big of an issue because…. We started home-schooling before we came here the first time. And that process of home-schooling gave, I think, gave our two kids stability, that they weren’t jumping into two different schools here and there. It probably saved them emotionally from the shock of it all. The school here on our block – it’s just out that window – has something like three thousand kids I think and it’s just like six years, seven years of elementary school. You know, so if [name] was in school, he’d be in a school with three hundred kids in his year; ten classes in his year. And we came from a school in [town] where there were 25-30 kids in a class and that was their year. So yeah it’s just vastly different, inner city schools and stuff. So that makes it easier for us so yeah.

INTERVIEWER: so did you make the decision to home-school because you were thinking of moving?

PHILIP: it was a bit of both I think. [wife’s name]… there’s stuff about the education system for younger kids that we, we probably just don’t like as much. I mean the Montessori school system we have an affinity to but we just can’t afford it. We looked at a Monetssori school here but it’s $2000 a month to send the kids to so… And we’ve looked at studies where in certain parts of Europe they don’t send their kids to school till six or seven and stuff like that. So certainly at the younger age we feel like there’s too much pressure on them and… I mean even now, everyone’s home-schooling now *[ie. Because of lockdown*] and the amount of work that they’re being given, it’s not just stressing the kids out, it’s stressing the parents out so …. So that was partly it, but we do feel, again, we felt God speak to us about that. [Wife’s name] specifically because it’s her that’s taken on the load. But she can’t work at the moment so it makes a lot of sense for her as well, to be giving herself to that. I mean we’re well aware that the older they get, the harder it will be to leave. My understanding is that once a kid turns sort of 11 or 12 it becomes very hard to then shift cultures again. So, for us we’re trusting that if we do have to leave when they’re 12 or 13, that God will have them. But we’re trusting that he’ll keep us here. Either that we’ll move back before they are or that he’ll look after us, so…. Yeah…

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me a bit about your support structures?

PHILIP: Yeah. Well that’s changed a lot over the two or three years we’ve been here. And there’s some complications for that really because we’ve gone from a [UK church network] church to – you’re part of … are you part of [church name]? I just assumed that… So we’re part of … [town name] is a [network] church and we’ve joined a [Country C network] church: Country C’s branch of [church network]. So there’s been a lot of learning in terms of how we do that because for us we, I mean, [UK leader] I’m speaking to him this week; his wife was going to come this summer and do a kids’ camp for us… we haven’t known them for that long but we have a huge amount of respect for them and they have cared for us and loved us in an incredible way. So we feel a real affinity to them. With [other UK leader], we’ve never again spent a huge amount of time with him: we’ve had lunch here and there and what have you, but there’s, we feel like a real supernatural connection with [leader] and just love the values that flow out of him. So there’s that, there’s that element of how we really love [UK network]. But at the same time we’ve landed in the Country C and have grown into relationship with some wonderful people here at [Country C network]. Our biggest support comes from the [church network] church in [Country C town] which is my employer. And there’s, the lead guy there is called [name] and his associate pastor for want of a better word is [name]: now they’re both English guys so that’s helpful. And we’ve grown very close with them. They’ve been incredibly supportive of us. And I think one of the things for me is that actions speak louder than words. So I’m, em, just because of my upbringing and stuff, I, for me to trust people I… I need them to not just say things, I need them to do things or to back their words up. And [name] and [name] have done that time and time again for us, so… em… if we do end up getting a green card, they’d have probably poured in (sum of money), into us as a couple. So for us that’s just communicated such a huge amount of value. So when it comes to, you know, getting support from them, we know that they believe in us. So we’re in: we’re bought in. So, pastorally they would kind of oversee us; [UK leader] checks in with us regularly. I don’t have a huge amount of contact now with [home church]. That’s not through, that’s not necessarily my desire, it’s just the way it’s unfolded for whatever reason. One of the, I was saying earlier about [church leader]: one of his downfalls probably would be that he’s not that pastoral. And so often it’s out of sight out of mind. He’s just very focussed on the local church so I think, for him to stand up and encourage people to church plant, for whatever reason for him I think, I’ve never really seen him do that. Because I think he’s too fixated on building the local church. But… but there are still people at that church we connect with but not necessarily the leadership. So, what else support do we get? [name of other leader] He and I skype regularly. He leads the church in [UK town]. So we spent a year over a period of time in [town] and went to their church as well and got to know them very very well, so they’ve been a great support. He’s on [network leader]’s team. And then financial support, we receive very little; obviously it was very large at the beginning. Which, we’re paid by [church network] church in [Country C city] but we’re only paid probably about three-quarters of what we need, just because of [city] prices and stuff. Our rent alone is [sum] a year, so we are, kind of, always trying to find ways to raise support funds. We do have a few people in the UK who give monthly. It’s not a huge amount though.

We were doing monthly emails and stuff and videos and stuff, but we’ve now moved onto Facebook, so we now have a Facebook group with about seventy people who are mainly friends from the UK and just we want to stay connected to. That’s just showing updates for them, so, yup.

INTERVIEWER: Do you get back to the UK much? (Obviously not at the moment)

PHILIP: I mean financially it’s very costly for us. It costs a lot of money. So I’m trying to think. We’ve been back once as a family and then I went back last year via [European country] – so I went to the church planting conference and I spent two days either side of that in the UK. I mean you can’t fly directly to [conference location] anyway from [Country C city]. So I flew into Heathrow, stayed a couple of days at home, then flew down to [conference]. So I’ve been back twice in two years, two-and-a-half years. And we haven’t got any plans as a family to go back any time soon. [Wife] has a wedding this October – I don’t know if she’ll get there or not but that’s the plan to go with [baby’s name].

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned Facebook there, can you tell me about your social media use? What do you use? How much?

PHILIP: We use… I mean from a personal perspective we use social media a fair amount. [Wife] has a website that she runs [name of website]. And that is kind of aimed at Christian parents – it’s got loads of resources on there. So she’s also got an Instagram page. So that’s a good creative outlet for her in a season where she can’t necessarily work, get paid to work: home-school is definitely work for her. Er…. Facebook… so we’re on Instagram quite a bit; Instagram is very family-orientated for us. Family and church: what we’re doing here and trying to show people what life is like for us. Facebook: I don’t use Facebook a huge amount to like share stuff or dialogue, but we do have this one Facebook page. It’s quite big… Facebook has like lots of local pages here in [district] so it’s a good way to communicate with our neighbourhood. There’s one page called [district] Parents: [name] is the neighbourhood we live in: it’s got 80 000 people in. And [district] Parents has something like 10 000 parents members on it, so it’s a good way to get a feel of what’s going on in the neighbourhood and lots of people post there. It’s also a great way to contact the local councillor who’s very involved. And then I use Twitter quite a lot and that’s mainly for sport, just keeping up to date with things so… Yeah that’s kind of our social media use. Whatsapp is… I don’t know if that’s considered social media, but that’s a great way we’ve been able to maintain connection with a lot of people. So videos and messages and stuff so…

INTERVIEWER: What’s your experience of team working?

PHILIP: [PAUSE] That would be one of the culture shocks, I think, moving here [laughter]. Em… team! Mmm. I mean, there’s a lot to say on that probably. One of my main loves is football, so right from a young age I always learnt the importance of team and my role in that team. And I knew my role. And, you know, even now as a coach, I’m aware of … I mean, I don’t know if you know anything about soccer or football but I’m not a particularly skilful player, er, but I’m a very hard-worker – or I used to be, I’ve given up playing now – and I’d work very hard for the team and I’d do a lot of the jobs that a lot of people didn’t want to do. And so I… the reason I share that is because I understood the difference between the best player and the most important player, and they’re not necessarily the same.

Let me just… my front door’s going… give me one minute!

So the most important player and the best player. And I think that’s, that can be true of any team. And that’s the lesson I’ve learnt a lot I think in these last few years. I think team… I was also in the police force and so working in team was just vital. You came to rely on your team for so much; a lot of the time for your physical safety. So again a real desire for a strong team and good connection. And then coming into the church. I worked … I think we had a pretty good team at [home church]. The staff team was very well connected. But I, I think probably one of my biggest frustrations probably in the last five years of church leadership has become – and I don’t know if you want to get into a theological discussion here – but for me, I think the role of the Elders has been vastly implemented incorrectly over the… whatever. I feel like the Elders have become like this management team that separates themselves from the people. And so you end up with the Elders doing everything and making all the decisions and not involving anyone else in that. And that’s been a real source of frustration for me. So when I was at [home church] I was … I was on the Eldership track in terms of becoming an Elder and then God spoke to us about Country C so we… I never became an Elder but for about two years was working with the Elders and was in the team. So therefore I was always second tier leadership. Which is fine, there’s nothing wrong with that. I’m just sort of painting the picture. And therefore I’d often feel like that, if that makes sense. And so I feel like I had a real amazing insight into what it’s like to be, to be in that level of leadership, and even for women to be in that situation. My wife and I, talking to her about how she feels. I have some great friends who I feel have church leadership callings over their lives but how does a woman express that in a context where the Elders do everything? How does that work? So that for me was a big frustration in the UK and we ended up doing some stuff… because there’s lots of stuff bubbling under the surface of the church with people asking the same sorts of questions. We wrote a paper on it and tried to implement some different things. I think they’ve, the church now have moved on into a better place, I hope, as a result of that. But then moving here, you know, we talked about the values of Country C-an society. Well the values of Country C-an *church* are very different as well. And I would say have been hugely shaped by [two theologians] in recent years and, er, I know [one of them has] fallen from grace, but even still for ten years he was a key player in you know the Gospel Coalition and, you know, laying a real foundation of theology. And [the other] as well. And [this theologian] is obviously extreme complementarian. And so, em, it’s not unusual for churches to have a teaching pastor who preaches fifty times a year, em, and to have one guy who’s the Senior Pastor who does everything. And, em, I, even in setting up ourselves as a charity and getting the by-laws and the articles of incorporation, the standard by-laws give a senior leader – give one person – a huge amount of authority. So we are re-writing; that’s been the bane of my life. It’s been about a four months’ journey of us trying to write by-laws that reflect the New Testament, what we feel. And I think we’re quite fortunate because the church in [region] they also have [name] one of the guys, he’s also really passionate about this as well and so he’s really helping to shape that. The way that they do their leadership is that they do have Elders, but the Elders are really seen as the fathers at the back of the church making sure that everyone’s OK. Like the New Testament shepherd principle. And they actual have a pastoral team who help run the church essentially, which is men and women together. So, so team for me is so important. I think I recognise in many ways my own failings. I’m not the … I recognise my role in the team. And, er, my personality has, you know, for church I’m, em, I’m quite strong-headed, I’m quite argumentative, I’m quite direct. And I appreciate that actually there are times when that’s really unhelpful. And so we need other people to take the lead on stuff. But even with [local couple] learning, we had a really difficult six months, twelve months probably, where you know, he would be making decisions without talking to anyone. And we ended up butting heads a lot. You know, we kept on saying that’s not OK, or we don’t like that, or that’s not how we work. So for about six months we had some really really tough conversations; it was a very unhelpful place, not a very nice place to be. But we’ve come through that and I think we’re in a really good spot now. So I don’t know if that’s what you’re looking for but team for me is, yeah, is very important.

INTERVIEWER: Are they a similar age to you, the couple that you’re working with?

PHILIP: Yeah, he’s like a month younger than me. I think they’re both 34 or 35. Yeah… I was trying to remember how old I was then! You get to a stage, don’t you? Yeah so we’re all in the same two or three years.

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

PHILIP: Not at all. My pleasure.