**004 Pseudonym: Ruth (husband referred to as ‘S’ throughout)**

INTERVIEWER: Could you just confirm for me that you’ve read the information about the study and that you’re happy to proceed?

RUTH: Yes, of course, that’s all absolutely fine.

INTERVIEWER: Great. Thank you. Just to start off with, could you tell me a bit about your faith history?

RUTH: Yes, of course. So my parents were missionaries in [African Country A] when I was born.

INTERVIEWER: So were you born there?

RUTH: Yes, I was born in [African city], yes. Very strong Christian background, missions background as well. Brought up obviously then in the faith. We came back when I was quite small so I don’t remember [African Country A]. But obviously they continued with church. I think, as a child, you know how it is with Christian children, there isn’t always a clear moment of salvation. I know that I had a bit of a time in my teenage years when I kind of went away from God a little bit. Nothing too major, but just kind of not really interested in God. And then, when I was fifteen was the time when I made a very definite personal commitment. I believe that I had as a child and I went away a little bit. But yeah, at fifteen, very strongly felt I should come back to God.

INTERVIEWER: What made you go away as a teenager? What were the issues?

RUTH: I think it’s just that kind of as you go into your teenage years, you’re dealing with hormones, you’re dealing with changes, and people at school and their value systems and I think there’s just that automatic desire to want to be popular to be liked and to be just kind of involved in whatever they are so I think it was just a case of kind of wanting to spend a lot more time with school friends and not seeing necessarily the value of church, of God, and I think just that kind of … although I’d had what I believe was a faith in the Lord before that point, I think it hadn’t really been challenged until that point. I think in that challenge I kind of went away and then God brought me back.

INTERVIEWER: So how did you come back? What happened?

RUTH: So, em, my parents had arranged for me to go onto a Christian youth camp. It was an [denomination] regional youth camp that they used to run every year. And I’d been on it previously and that kind of thing. I wasn’t overly interested in going, but wasn’t completely against going either. And I knew that I’d be able to, there was some nice young people there… so I went along quite happily to that. And then just during that time, obviously you get all the fun and the games, but you also have your seminars, you have evening meetings, and it was just in one of those. And I couldn’t tell you what the preacher was speaking on or anything else like that, but I just remember this absolute sense by the end of the meeting that I need to come back to God and that I have to do it tonight. And I kind of, it was in a large tent, it wasn’t one of these where there’s hundreds of other young people around me all seeking God as well, it was just very much a me and God thing. And a couple of times I kind of tried to leave the tent, em, and I really just within my spirit just really felt no, I can’t just make a half-hearted decision here; this has got to be a permanent decision. I can’t make the decision “yeah, I’m going to do this” but then next week I’m going to be back out with my school friends and in town and stuff. And I think, I honestly think God was protecting me from something that would have happened or where I would have gone to, em, but I felt strongly I had to make a decision that night. And I did and it was rock solid and I’ve never ever, even when I went back to school wasn’t ever tempted to change.

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

RUTH: OK. So, the following year, so that was in 1995, in the August that I had that real moment with God. And then, well actually, before I go to the August. Because I’d had this really really deep encounter with God in August 95, and so now I went to like almost the other extreme. So whereas I’d been very apathetic about church before, now I had such a deep connection with God that I really wanted to take this wherever he wanted to take me. And in the February there was an opportunity to go and do a local mission, which was in [UK town], and just to go and do some schools work and some street work and different things with other young people. Nobody else from church went or was interested in that kind of thing, there were no other young people at that point interested in that, but yeah, by this point I was so kind of solid that I wanted to do something for God that that didn’t bother me. So I went by myself, em, onto this mission in the February. Whilst there there was young people from lots of different places, including the man who would become my husband. During this particular few days I didn’t speak to him, em, just because there was so many young people there. He was with another church. But because obviously being before the age of smart phones and text messages and everything, I took everybody’s address at the time that I left, em, because I wanted to have, I missed in my church having young people that understood why I wanted to do what I wanted to do. So when I got back to my home in the February I literally wrote to everybody that had been on that camp, male or female, everybody that had been on that camp. Got some replies, some of them I maintained a penpal relationship for a while. S, my now husband, didn’t reply initially, but then later was challenged by one of his pastors when he was moaning about not having a girlfriend “do something about it” and he decided to write back to me. So we had a bit of a letter conversation over the following months. And because I’d been in such a strong Christian home there was a lot I knew about the Bible and theology, whereas S came from a completely unchurched family. So even though he was a few years older than me, I had a lot more knowledge. So I was teaching him some things about, you know, Genesis, and different things. And we said, well we’ll meet up at this next youth camp. So this is then a year on from where God had convicted me. So then in the August we had the youth camp again. The [denominational] one. So I knew that I wanted to meet S, wasn’t entirely sure I remembered who he was or what he looked like, having this letter conversation.

INTERVIEWER: pre internet days!

RUTH: yeah, exactly. I just hoped I’d recognise him. We said hello. Had one or two little conversations, nothing too big. And then on one evening, it would be the 7th of August 96, we had a walk down to the seafront, em, and when I got down to the seafront – it was a midnight walk for the whole camp – we I got down we just ended up standing next to each other and talking. Had a really good conversation and it just felt like it was right. I mean, it’d felt right when we’d been writing these letters, there was just a connection. So we walked all the way back up. And this is when it comes back to your question and why I’ve explained all this background. As we were walking back up, he said “I feel called to be a missionary.” He said, “I have this since I got saved” and he only got saved during his A-Levels, he says, “I just have always believed I’m meant to be a missionary, I’m meant to go to Africa.” So I was like “ooh. I know my parents were missionaries in Africa, but it’s not really the path I want to take. I’d rather work with young people in Britain.” So we said, ok, well this feels like there’s a real connection here but this is a problem because we’ve both got strong callings that don’t line up. So we said, well, let’s pray about it and see what happens. So we prayed about it. And then the following week, so after camp, the following Sunday the missionaries from [African Country B] came to my church in R and the lady came up to me and she says, look I’m not a person who prophesies a lot or talks to people, but I feel I have to tell you that you are going to go and work where I’ve worked. Erm. And she was in [African Country B]. And in a place, literally the same building that I then went to much later. The same week, S was asked by his church to become the main youth leader, youth pastor, there. And we kind of felt like that was God showing us that actually both of our callings could be meshed together and that actually there’s different times, there’s different seasons. And so because S had this strong call to Africa, then, er, that was something that then began to grow in me as well.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me how you came to actually be there?

RUTH: Yep. So the first one was quite a miraculous call. So this is now in 1998. So I’ve been dating S for two years. Erm, and we haven’t really done anything about this potential mission call. Erm, but kind of talked about it sometimes. I was doing my A-levels at the time, and I was home one day – I can’t remember if I had lessons off or whatever but I was watching daytime TV. And there used to be a programme called Travelog. And on Travelog, so it just happened it was on, I wasn’t deliberately watching it, it just came on. It was a show about [African Country C] And I’d never even heard of [African Country C]. I knew nothing about it. But as I sat and watched this TV show on [African Country C] I just felt this really strong, I won’t say like an audible voice from God, but this kind of real sense of “I need to go there.” Erm, and this kind of, I was really gripped by it in a way that I’d never been gripped by anything before. And this real sense of “I have to go to this place.” So I phoned S that evening, erm, landline phone of course, and we had a chat. And I said to S, I’ve watched this TV show today and I really feel I need to go to [African Country C]. And he said, well that’s really interesting because I’ve had forms come through from [Mission Organisation] and he said, they do all these mission trips, they do Love Belgium, and Love France, he says, but there’s one called Love [African Country C], he says. And I filled that in today and requested an application form for both of us. So that was kind of our first experience of it, this kind of like really miraculous calling to a country I’d never even heard of. But both of us on the same day. And, er, so we went there. We went through all the application process and we went to [African Country C].

INTERVIEWER: That was with [Mission Organisation]?

RUTH: Yes, yes. So that was in summer 1998.

INTERVIEWER: I was going to say, that was a short term summer programme, wasn’t it? The “Love” – I remember looking at Love Europe

RUTH: Yes. Definitely. I think those programmes were quite popular for a while. Yeah, so it was eight weeks in [African Country C]. Em. It started off with training in [African Country B]. We flew to [City B], had training in [City C], went overland up to [African Country C], spent then probably about six weeks in northern rural [African Country C]. And then travelled back to [African Country B] overland and flew home. Erm. Do you want to know any more about that, or?

INTERVIEWER: Just… I guess… so you ended up finally going long term… and that was during you’re a-levels, so what happened next?

RUTH: OK. So I suppose it does actually relate to the [African Country C] trip. Because, well, a lot of things went wrong during that trip in one sense, I mean, we had a great time, really good ministry. I was really surprised because, em, a lot of people on the trip weren’t interested in like speaking in the churches and that and we did mainly practical work in the week, a lot of building and cleaning and everything else. But there was opportunities to do ministry as well. And I thought we’d all be fighting each other like, let me speak, let me do something… And actually me and S were some of the only people who really wanted to do that – there was one other guy. So we had some really great times. Great memories. Em, but also a number of things went wrong. S got malaria at one point, very mildly because he was on Larium but he got malaria. I got cryptosporidiosis – which is a kind of food poisoning, stomach bug that lasts for a while. I had to travel all the way through [Country D], [Country E], [African Country C] and [Country B] in the back of a cramped bus with that illness. When we got back into [Country B], we were attacked by men with axes. And they took everything. Well, because I had the smallest bag, so this was still while I was very very sick, I had the smallest bag so I had the most taken because my stuff was easy to take. So literally everything was taken. Passport, flight tickets, money, souvenirs, dirty washing, which was the most distressing. And everything kind of went wrong. But yet I think it was actually partly that that kind of cemented the fact that we believed in this because we turned round and said to each other afterwards, having kind of gone through that, that I want to come back here, this feels like the right place. And I think it was partly because so many things had gone wrong that there was no kind of human way that we wanted to walk straight back into that. We felt quite strongly that that was, yeah, that we’re meant to come back. Then again, we didn’t know quite what to do with that for quite a long time. And because I’d been quite young when we started dating, we dated for four years. I didn’t want to get married before I was twenty. And so we were still dating. Then we got married in 2000. And we still had this calling. And around this kind of time, so 1999 kind of time, we were thinking, well what do we actually do about this calling to [Country B]. We’ve got this. We didn’t really know how to move forward with it. It was just kind of a vague feeling that we should be in [Country B], but, you know, do we just turn up with suitcases? What do we actually do? And I think – and one thing I would advise young people now – is, we did really well on the kind of praying side of things. And kind of like, Lord, what do we do? But we didn’t do very well on the practical side of things. And I would always advise someone who feels they’ve got a call to do a lot more research and looking into options and just kind of positioning themselves where, you know, God could show them things. But I think God’s really gracious to us. So in 1999 my Grandad died and, em, he’d been a real man of God – I think he’d probably prayed us into the mission field. And, em, at his funeral was the same couple, the lady who’d spoken to me about [Country B] back in 1996. And they were at his funeral. I probably hadn’t seen them in between that time at all. And they spoke to us, just briefly, with it being a funeral and things. But, again, they heard that there’s this kind of passion for [Country B]. And because they’d been in [Country B] for a long time, the only thing I can assume is that they arranged what happened next but I never had confirmation. Because a few weeks later we got through the post a prospectus for [school name], which is an African mission training college where you do training programmes, theology programmes, but you actually work. Really practical, it’s not like going to a Bible college because really you’re working in the community, em, and then you’re training alongside it as opposed to being you’re studying and then doing a little bit of something else. So we got this prospectus. And again it was just one of these, as soon as it arrived, it felt like this was the answer, this was what we’d been looking for. And we just kind of felt, well, we wanted to have a year together being married before we went out, we kind of felt that that was a bit of a Biblical concept as well. So we spoke to our pastor and our leadership and everybody and presented to them what we’d like to do, and they were really on board. There was certain things they wanted us to do, be involved with in the local church. But we’d always been really active in the local church. Our senior pastor said, but you’ve always served in everything that actually it’s a pleasure to release you into mission. So, em, so then we booked, we contacted the college, and we arranged for a year after we got married – we got married in 2000, em, and I think with the way that their academic terms start in January, so I think it didn’t work out, because we got married in the middle of 2000, so we didn’t want to start within a year, so we didn’t start in January 2001, we started in January 2002. And then we went out there and … so that was the first time we were out in Africa. So we spent three years out there. And were involved in many community projects. But also did studying alongside that.

INTERVIEWER: that sounds interesting. So what’s your role now?

RUTH: So we had those three years in [Country B]. We had something else planned after that that then fell through. So we then spent a little bit of time in the UK. We then went back to [Country B] for four years, worked in communities but actually also went back and were faculty at this college and teaching there as well. And then when we were coming to the end of the time there… I mean, we started having visa issues, and then, we were teaching a programme called Kairos, which is a missions mobilisation programme. And during that you pray for different people groups that are unreached or less reached. And one of them was the (East Central European Country F]. And so we were quite… convicted… challenged… by this, that somewhere so close to home had so few Christians. And then whilst we were trying to sort out our visa, we came back to the UK and we ended up meeting somebody who was heading up programmes over Europe. And spoke to him. And we ended up doing a little bit of a tour round different countries in Europe. So what we do now is an outworking of that. Erm. And. So we work… so we’re no longer sort of living out on the field, which we tried to do at first, em, but what we do is we work with indigenous or national church planters, church leaders, youth leaders. We do leadership development and mentoring. So what we do is we work alongside national leaders because we believe that they’re some of the best placed to plant churches that are relevant into their local communities. But many of the people we work with, they’re in small villages, they’re bi-vocational, no opportunity for training or even experiences that would maybe help them. So what we do is we bring some training over according to what they feel they need. And we go over regularly into Europe. We bring, we either do the training ourselves or we bring in specialists, em, and then when we’re not in the country, we’re doing ongoing mentoring by Skype, not necessarily Skype, as I say I don’t tend to use that – Messenger.

INTERVIEWER: Messenger is more popular in Europe.

RUTH: Exactly. And now we’re finding a few more people using Zoom and things if they’ve got some Scripture. So yeah, so doing things like that. And emails. And just ongoing support. So we get involved in a lot of things like leadership crises, and just challenges that people have got. Definitely a mentoring, encouraging, discipling, training kind of role in Europe at the moment.

INTERVIEWER: Sounds good. Can you tell me, along the way, who have been your models in your faith?

RUTH: Oh, that’s a good question. Erm. I mean, I suppose in terms of close to home, one of the people I’ve always massively respected was the senior pastor that I mentioned before who was my senior pastor when we first went out. His name’s JA, he’s been very involved in getting a lot of people interested in mission and I think he was one of the people who really grew – when I was still trying ot work out my own calling for mission even as S felt strongly, he was somebody that actually really inspired me. And continues to do so – he’s not my pastor any more. But in terms of his integrity and the way that he did things, erm, I would definitely say that he, in terms of a real-life person who I connected to. In terms of other models, thinking of like, you know, I’ve read a lot of missionary biographies. A couple of the ones that struck me as the strongest when I was growing up and therefore probably informed what I was doing, well probably the three that I immediately think of are Isobel Kuhn – so she wrote a book “By Searching” – and it was about her relationship with God. And I found that very inspirational. She also talks about how God dealt with her character on a lot of issues. So, for example, when she was falsely accused of something and she expected God to immediately justify her and and he didn’t, and actually he showed her that it was actually about her character. And actually He needed to be able to deal with it, it wasn’t what other people thought of it. Erm. And similarly God challenged her about her priorities and what she was doing. And so in terms of character I think that she was one of my biggest inspirations and I think that that has helped me in missions because, em, the fact that she had to learn priorities and had to learn that it’s about what God thinks not about what people think, I think that’s a really big thing in mission. So she’s one. Another one is Bilquis Sheikh – I don’t know if I’m pronouncing that right – which is the book “I dared to call Him Father”, about a Muslim woman coming to faith. And I think that was very inspirational as, for missions. Just seeing somebody in a completely different culture, seeing the hardship of their culture, and how rejected people from that culture would be for following Jesus. I think that gave me a lot more cross cultural understanding. Er, and just understanding how big God was, how he could work in different ways as well. And then the third one would be the classic “Gates of Splendour”, Jim Elliot, and then obviously Elizabeth Elliot and then Nate Saint and the others. And the fact that they were willing to give their all. And the various things. You know, not just that moment, but just everything leading up to that as well. So, they were probably three of the kind of missionary heroes that I looked up to. I don’t know if that’s quite what you were wanting or… ?

INTERVIEWER: yeah… just whatever, I guess anyone that’s had an impact in your faith and your walk.

INTERVIEWER: em… would you call yourself a missionary?

RUTH: I would. Yes. I would say now… so when we were in Africa I think it was really clear to people that we were missionaries because we were living on the field, we were engaging daily in Christian ministry. So I think it was really clear and easy for people to see that we were missionaries. In some ways now it’s a lot more difficult. And we had to wrestle with this. As I say, when we first had this calling to Europe – so not just [ECE Country F], it’s projects in different places, but [ECE Country F]’s been one of the places we’ve done a lot. And we finished well. I mean, I didn’t say that, but I should just say when we went back to Africa we felt this calling to Europe, but we went and we spent another not quite a year there, to make sure that we handed everything that we were involved in on well. But we did feel that it was time to move on. Yeah, so we tried to move into Europe. To the extent that we were working with Kingdom Bank and other banks looking at trying to get a mortgage. We looked at lots of renting options, we actually visited several houses in the [ECE Country F], em, so we were really pushing this. And every door constantly closed. And after about a year of this, em, we kind of really sat down and prayed. And the impression that we felt was that actually we were trying to impose onto “missionary” our understanding and expectations of that. So we had always lived on the field and most people we knew lived on the field, so therefore we assumed that was the only way you could do it. And actually… and obviously having been working there for a year, we understood the culture and that a lot more. And God really showed us a number of things. Because what happened at that point when we were asking God why is this not working, when you called us to do something why is it not working? And S was contacted by a pastor in [ECE Country F], a different area to any we’d been in, that had met S before – and he said, oh could you come and speak that this, we’ve got this big kind of church event with different churches and things, he said, would you be able to come down and do it? And S was like, yeah, yeah, that’d be great. And it turned out this pastor thought that S was in the [ECE Country F] when he was doing it, and the reason he was concerned about asking S is sometimes there could be a lot of church politics, in terms of different regions and who could go where and who was in charge. And there was a bit of a belief that actually we would be tied to this particular region and we wouldn’t be allowed to go into other regions. And we found that out at this point and we really felt, the impression that we felt that God was saying was that “actually I told you to work in Europe, I didn’t tell you to live in Europe.” And so, we see now, for example I did a big conference where we wanted it peer led, so we wanted not to bring in anybody from Britain or Australia or anybody like that. We wanted local leaders to speak, so it was all a peer led conference, we just organised it. And we ran it in [ECE Country G], but we had people from [ECE Country G], [ECE Country H] and [ECE Country F] there. And there was so much aggression in the background, this is one of things I would be more cautious in putting out there, in terms of how you put it out there, but there was a lot of racism in the background, where a lot of the (Country G] people were really – they didn’t want to listen to any of the [ECE Country F] or the [Country H] speakers. They said, what can [ECE Country F] or [Country H] offer us? And we had to really, it was like a real spiritual battle. We had to battle all of this attitude in making it happen. The conference itself went amazing and we got a lot of apologies afterwards for the attitude. It was awful at the time for me. I mean, it was really hard in the background dealing with some of this stuff. But the actual conference was great. And again, that demonstrated to us, actually if we lived in one village in [ECE Country F], which is what we’d been trying to do, we would have ended up getting, working with one local church, possibly a few local churches to a lesser extent, but we wouldn’t have been able to work strategically in lots of different places. And actually, coming from outside and not having that local politics involved, we could just ignore a lot of that. Actually, it enabled us to be more effective. So, I’ve got a knock at the door, will you just give me one second…..

…

Yeah, so actually, we discovered that we were able to be more strategic with being here. So yeah, but we definitely see ourselves as being missionaries. We’re working cross-culturally. It’s continuous, we’re not just doing a series of short-term missions trips, we are doing one set of projects continuously. So whether we’re in the UK or whether we’re in [ECE Country F] or [Country G] or [Country I], we’re still working on the same projects, training national leaders to plant churches, em, we’ve also helped them introduce food banks and different projects. So I would say for me, we definitely see ourselves as missionaries.

INTERVIEWER: You’ve covered it a bit, but I was going to ask, how do you take major decisions?

RUTH: Yeah, I think we try very much to really be really God-focussed. We do definitely, any major decisions, we do definitely pray about them first. But even, for example with moving to this house, em, it was, we were, when we came back we were in a tiny little house, em, a bit small really for our family. We wanted to move out and we prayed, Lord should we move house? And obviously, and this was now as we’re coming out of this ‘it’s not going to work to move to [ECE Country F]’. So then we’re thinking, ok, so can we move house in the UK? Is that what God wants of us? And we really felt no. We really felt strongly that was not the right thing to do. So, em, and what we did is we kind of timetabled it almost. Every two to three months we re-prayed about it. And then at one point we both felt at the same time, yes. And then at that point we put our house up for sale. And this house that we’re in now, which is perfect and an amazing value house, you know, meets everything that wanted in terms of being able you know to have church groups and things here but for a low price. And that wouldn’t have been available if we’d moved when we first wanted to and if we hadn’t waited two or three years for God to say yes. So we do definitely, any major decisions we definitely focus on praying about it first. Obviously not everything in life you get like a clear answer on. So, we have a bit of a technique where what we do is we really pray about it, but if we don’t feel a clear guidance either way, then we kind of go, what we do is we think, ok, well this seems to us the best way forward, based on you know our own feelings, based on common sense, based on I don’t know just what seems the most appropriate way forward. And then what we’ll do is we’ll then pray about it again but we’ll say to God: we are going to do this, so we’re going to take this path forward, em, get involved with this project, or not get involved with this project, but if we’re making the wrong decision, then will you put something, will you block it in some way? So that again, it’s still bringing it back to God but we’re not just kind of always on hold not doing anything and erm, as well. We do move things forward. Even if we haven’t had a clear word. I think we need to apply common sense to our spirituality as well. And we definitely, obviously do everything together. S and I, we’re very close. We do…. I mean we’ve been together a long time now, what ‘96 we got together so I don’t even know how long that is now. What’s that, 24 years? Something like that. So we think alike, I think having had all that time. Em. And so…. We always talk to each other a lot about any decision. So it’s never a case of S makes a decision and I just have to go with it, or I just make a decision and he has to go with it. It’s very much a em a joint decision.

INTERVIEWER: Do you consult others?

RUTH: Yeah, em. So, with anything to do with our mission we have different people that we’re accountable to for different parts. So, so when we first came back to England and I mentioned that we were in touch with a guy that’s running a lot of projects in Europe, so that was called [Organisation]. So anything that we do in connection with any of his projects, then we would always seek his advice and input first. Then we consider ourselves 100% accountable to him for anything in connection with his organisation. There’s a lot of – it’s not like a traditional organisation, there is a lot of free reign in that. But we would always speak with him about everything. We’re also affiliated with the [denomination] as missionaries. And again, so, there’s people on like the missions board there that we would always speak to. If there’s any major changes we would always speak to them and get their advice and input. And then on a local church level because we’ve had a lot of changes in the local church in the past couple of years and S is also working as an Assistant Pastor now as well. But yeah, anything major we would also bring you know discuss with the Senior Pastor and other elders as well.

INTERVIEWER: How are you supported? I mean in all aspects, so financially, prayer, whatever.

RUTH: Yeah. So, yeah, when we were in Africa it was 100% support-based, churches that supported us. We had one primary church that supplied the vast majority of our needs. Which in one sense was a blessing, em because you know it was so much coming in from one place. But I don’t always think that is the best way forward because later when we did have a challenge – I’ll mention that in a minute – then obviously all your eggs are in one basket so it’s, em, I think it’s better to kind of diversify the support a little bit if possible. Yeah, so while we were in Africa that’s how it was. When we came back and we started working, this church that was giving us almost all our support and then a few other individuals and other churches giving little bits. We talked to them about what we felt that God had said about working in Europe, and they were totally on-board with that. They agreed, they prayed, bit of an Acts 13 one, they also felt that we were hearing God right to do the right thing. And they said that they would continue to support us. So that was fine. So they continued to be our primary support. I’ll come to the other types of support in a second, I’m talking about finance mainly at the moment. And then, em, there was a change in leadership at the church. Now the guy that came in, initially he told us that they would continue and he made a commitment of three years that they would continue to support us on this. Now, during this time, we’d had, well I’d had like… I’m hesitant to use the word “vision” because I don’t think it was as strong as a vision, but I’d had a kind of impression of S working at a local church but still doing what we were doing in Europe. Which seemed impossible because how could you do both? But we did. We’d learnt from when we were younger and we’d just been praying and not exploring options. So this time we tried exploring options as well as praying. And anyway, a church, we were looking at different roles that were coming up. We’d applied, we got in contact with a church that was advertising for a Community Pastor. And we explained to them, we said we’re missionaries in Europe, em, but actually we feel that God’s telling us to do this as well. So we’re not quite sure how that’s going to work. They seemed to be on board at first and they planned to release us quite a bit per year to work in Europe. Then last minute they changed their mind. Erm. But because we’d started that journey with them, and some other people who we knew knew we’d started that, I think that made them aware that we were open to different options. And again I think that’s maybe why that happened, because we wouldn’t have asked them otherwise. So the fact that that fell through actually opened the door that wouldn’t have always been there. And so a local pastor called us in and he says I really feel God’s told me to have you on my team at church. At this point it was before he knew that this had fallen through. He believed that we were still going to this other church. He says, I know that you’ve already got a role at another church, and he says I can’t get it off my mind having you on my leadership team here. And that was when we told him, well actually they’ve changed their mind. We’re still in communication with them to see if we can sort it out, erm… It never did get sorted out so he said, right, you come and get started. So S started a part-time pastoral role at this church. And the idea being that then he was doing essentially two days, sixteen hours a week, that was paid. Two days for that and he was having then three days, the rest of the time, to do the mission work, to do the ongoing mentoring and organising and everything else. I was full-time released to be able to do the mission work. And then the church would, in addition to annual leave, release us for six weeks a year to go and do the mission work in Europe. And then on top of that, we could do flying trips on like his days off and do a lot of short things. So it’s quite amazing really that actually a church would agree to that, to allow us to do so much. So we started that. And obviously we spoke to the church that was our primary supporter and said “well we understand that this might mean that you just want to stop supporting us now because we’ve got this other role. It isn’t enough for everything, but obviously we want you to understand that S will now be doing two days a week in this other job.” And they said, oh no, you’re still doing missions work, you’re still doing exactly what you were before, we want to continue our commitment for the next three years. So that was fantastic. But then after a few months, they sent us a letter and basically overnight stopped it. They changed their mind on that. But because we had the salary now, even though it was only two days a week, that kept us going when we’d have been struggling otherwise. And the church that stopped it didn’t stop it because S had got this other role, but they stopped it because of their own situation and their own finances. So that would have happened even if S didn’t have this role. So we felt very protected that God had actually positioned us in a place that when they suddenly stopped everything we weren’t just left with no income. We’ve tried since then to kind of build up a bit of a support base elsewhere. So S does now have an income from this church as a salary. So the way that we see it is that we try to live – we live extremely economically, very frugally – we try to keep this two-day a week income for all of our living costs.. And then we try to raise support from churches and individuals for then all of our mission work. So all of that is support-based, funded. Churches, individuals. It is more challenging not living out on the field to get that. But we have got a number of people that do it. We do need to try – I think we’re at a point we need to try and see if we can get a few more on board. And I’m also always doing things to try and raise money in different ways. So I do some photography based on our mission trips as well. So we do little things to try and tent-make within that. So that’s kind of how our financial support’s working. So we’ve got a salary for… a part-time salary for some things and then support base from churches and individuals for the rest.

In terms of prayer support, and every other kind of support, that really comes out of our own church and then the connections that we’ve made over the years. People who’re either supporting us now or have supported us as well.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me about your experience of working in teams?

RUTH: It’s difficult to know exactly how to define a team I suppose. So when we were working in [African Country B] the second time, and we – part of our role there, as well as the community projects that we were involved in, as I say we were also faculty of the Bible college there. So there was then a long period of time that we were living on campus. And I suppose you could describe that as a team, the kind of faculty and the leadership of the missions training college. And, I mean it’s like with any team. There’s good points and there’s bad points. I think the fact that we were living with people all the time, like a lot, I think when you get mission stations and different things you’ll get that kind of thing as well, where people are really living together and working together. That can get a little bit claustrophobic. In that if you take, I don’t know, a lie-in on a Saturday morning and your curtains are still closed at 10 o’clock or whatever, it’s very obvious to everybody and everybody knows. So everybody knows everything. We tried within that to deliberately sometimes get out. So a lot of people still went to the same church as well as living together, working together. We tried to go to a different church just to have different connections and a different group of people. At the same time it was a real blessing. And I miss being able to just go and call on somebody a few doors up and just go and have a coffee with them. Now back in the UK when you’ve got to phone, you know, you’ve got to email somebody several weeks in advance and have an appointment to see them. I miss that kind of organic-ness of team. I would say in general we’ve got on… we’re very easy to get on with. We’re pretty laid back. We tend to get on with people even if they’re very strong-willed personalities, we can tend to cope with that without being particularly intimidated. And at the same time it’s fine to also work with quite the opposite, you know, quite shy and quiet people. I do think the fact that we easily get on with a wide range of characters and personalities has helped us in team.

INTERVIEWER: do you think that’s just who you are? What do you think has made you able to do that?

RUTH: yeah, I do think that kind of, I mean, Peter Wagner talks about giftings and there’s a book about… he goes beyond say your nine gifts of the Spirit or your Ephesians 4 gifts, he talks about all different kinds of gifts and he talks about the “gift of missionary” in there and he talks about gift mixes. Whether I would take absolutely everything he says, I don’t know. What I would say is I think he’s right that God does gift the right people for what they need to do. And maybe part of just kind of what God has given us in our characters has been that ability to get on with people, which has then been useful. At the same time, obviously that gets challenged and tested multiple times. So with that slight claustrophobic feel, it’s a little bit how you deal with that. So I think there is a choice in “I’m going to keep making this work even if this person’s really irritating me.” You know. So I think there is a choice in that. But yeah, I think that it’s partly just who we are, but maybe God made us that way deliberately. And I think, but I think it is partly learned behaviour as well. That we choose to make sure that we get on and not let small things become big things.

INTERVIEWER: on that note, how have you found living and working in different cultures?

RUTH: yeah. So we’ve probably been through a variety of culture shock. One of the things that I do a lot of now is Member Care with missionaries, *because* we’ve experienced it I think so strongly ourselves. So, I find.. so when we were in [Country B] obviously there’s a number of different people groups there anyway. *[ethnic mix of Country B removed]*. And when we were working at the missions training college we would then also get, em, students in from all over the world. We got a lot in from different parts of Africa, but not just our area of Africa, it was also, you know, [other regions of] Africa and different places. We got a few in from South America, we got a few in from Asia. So we were constantly surrounded by different cultures. A couple of specific memories of that. I remember when we were students initially and we studied things like cross-cultural communication and different things. And they gave us a questionnaire. And everyone in our class was all different races and nationalities. And it seemed a really easy obvious questionnaire. It was things like, you know, what causes disease? And questions like that. And then you’d have a range of options. So to us it was not one where you had to particularly think about any of the answers hard, it was just kind of obvious. If somebody’s got cryptosporidiosis it’s caused by that particular bacteria or a parasite or a virus or whatever it is, you know, that’s in there. And so then the fact that other people would then come out with, you know, “it’s a spiritual issue”, “it’s demons”, it’s … this kind of thing. I remember sitting there and being astounded that somebody would actually genuinely believe this and not see that it is coming from bacteria or whatever. And we were really challenged. And it’s one of the few things that I can remember strongly, that actually things can be different but not wrong. And I think that was one of the times that I really had the foundations of my cultural, em, my ethnocentrism, challenged. And then I think a lot of times since then, because you’ve got that lesson in mind, I think then a lot of times when people would be talking to you and your initial reaction is “don’t be silly” that actually you’d stop and think “actually, let’s just think because maybe I’m the one who’s wrong here” and maybe I’ve not thought this through or maybe we’re both right and it’s just looking at the same thing from a different perspective. I found in general, that the closer a culture seems to be to your own, in some ways the more frustrating it is. So, what I mean by that is that in the [white African] culture, which kind of you would take as much more similar to a British culture, em, the little differences actually were far more frustrating than when I was in a completely African rural community. And I don’t know if that’s partly expectation, because I’ve walked into an African village expecting everything to be utterly different. And I expect an Australian or a Canadian or an American or an Afrikaaner to be more like me in the way I think. So I think it probably could be expectations. I’m also reminded of the thing that when they do – oh gosh, what do they call it? You know when they’re doing like animated people for like new TV shows and things and it’s… they say that the closer something looks to human, the more creepy it gets. And actually sometimes they have to deliberately make it that it’s illustrated and not try to look human. Because, yeah, there’s something about that closeness which actually then when it’s so close but it’s not quite right, em, that kind of thing can be frustrating. Em, and there’s some of the beliefs that they would have – cultural values – such as, em, oh I don’t know… A lot of [white African] people would get extremely angry about like Christmas and they would be like “it’s a pagan holiday, you shouldn’t celebrate it because it’s based in pagan traditions.” Whereas I would be, well, I understand the history of that, but I also think that God can redeem anything and actually I’m not celebrating the pagan tradition; I’m celebrating the birth of Christ. So therefore, that’s what my focus is on. And so things like that where the cultural values were just slightly, yeah, would become some of the more frustrating things for me.

INTERVIEWER: How do you think Britishness is viewed in other cultures?

RUTH: It probably depends where you are and what their experience is of other British people. I do think there is still too much at times of the colonial thing. Not just from history. Sometimes I speak to people now, going out on say short-term mission trips somewhere, and it’s still a very much “oh, we’re going over there to help the poor little black children.” And stuff like that. Which…. We’ve tried very much to have partnership and to respect other cultures and to respect, yeah, em, people doing things slightly differently. Obviously without compromising what we feel are kind of the core values of the Bible. But… I do think that there can be…. I think it’s worse (if I can be completely honest) with Americans. Obviously not colonialism. But in terms of em the kind of Western superiority. Em… and I’ve worked with people of a number of different nationalities and we used to host a lot of teams out where we worked in [Country B], em. For example, one time we had an American team come over. They did… they worked with a youth setting. At the end of the evening they said, you know, who wants to be saved? And you know loads of people put their hands up. And then they came out and they were like, “what have you guys been doing for years? We go in for one meeting and we save the whole congregation!” And we’re just like… And like everybody there has already, you know, they’ve heard the gospel a number of times, most of them had already responded more than once. And, you know, they had no idea of the kind of culture of respecting the person who’s speaking and answering “yes” regardless. So I think that’s American rather than British in that particular example, but I think that some British groups have done similar things as well. And I think there can… I think from the British side there can sometimes still be that slightly superior attitude and I think that is then sensed by people on the field and then extrapolated to everybody. So I do think sometimes Britishness can be seen as slightly arrogant. But I really think it varies on the context. I think there’s others who will be… I mean, I know some people who are just so grateful for what British missionaries have done in their culture in the past and that. So I don’t think there’s a blanket statement so I wouldn’t want to be thought of as saying oh yeah, people see British as arrogant because I don’t think that is the case, but I think that there are pockets where that happens.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have plans for the future?

RUTH: I would say, we are some of the people who are probably the most fluid and open to things that I’ve met. When I talk to a lot of people, the idea of kind of moving out of their area is a massive idea. And it’s kind of like… I think… For some people I think it would never happen. And for some I think it would take, you know, a lot of real miracles to happen. I genuinely feel that if we felt a strong call to go to the Middle East tomorrow, we’d go. Erm… I mean obviously when I say tomorrow, we’d put steps in place… to do it well and to do it right. But I do think. Now… and… We try to hold onto things loosely. Which is not easy, especially as I say when two or three years ago God gave us this beautiful house. My children are now in school for the first time cos I … because of the mission work in Africa, and then because we thought we’d be living in Europe, and then because of the travel… I home educated my children. So it’s only September that they’ve gone into mainstream schools for the first time.

INTERVIEWER: So how old are they?

RUTH: C will be 14 next month and L was 11 last week. So yeah, 11 and 13 at the moment. So now that they’re in school, that makes things harder. I would still, if we felt… I think for me it’s one of these things where we would need a clear word of God to go and move out and to do something major. Because of the disruption it would cause. But I do definitely feel that we are some of the people who would do that. So in terms of what plans I have for the future, I really don’t know. And sometimes that frustrates me, because I’d like to be able to tell you: right, in five years I’ll be here, and in another five years I’ll be in this place. Because that’s the kind of person that I am naturally. An organiser. And I really like things planned and structured. But God doesn’t work that way with us. I think because that’s how we are. And I think he challenges us in our faith. At the moment I don’t feel a specific call to change – I don’t have any plans to change what I’m doing in the near future. I would say that the emphasis of what I’m doing at the minute has changed a little bit in the last year. I’m doing not just work with national church planters, I’m doing also a lot more missionary care. That’s always been something that I’ve been involved in, but I’m doing a lot more of that now. And the [denomination] have asked me to take that on for them. And so that is kind of, yeah, definitely kind of something that I’m doing a lot more of. But that is not to say that any of the other work is stopping. And I think we’re planning just to be open to always… The idea of working with indigenous church planters and leaders is that you don’t just stay working with the same group of people forever but that actually it’s discipleship, that you are training and equipping, till they can have a church that is self-sustaining, self-governing, self-propagating. Em, and then once those churches reach that, they don’t need as much input, em, they still need encouragement in the way that any church leader would, em, but you don’t need to be in there several times a year doing training. You maybe need to go in once a year with some encouragement. So the idea with all of our projects is that they kind of diminish over time, em, and then start looking for something else to really sow ourselves into. But in terms of the nature of that, at the minute, I would say it’s continuing as we are until we hear differently.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned, earlier you used the expression “the core values of the Bible”. I wonder if you could give me a little run-down on what you consider them to be?

RUTH: Yep. So we are evangelical Christians. Erm. So, I think and, there’s kind of like four tenets of Evangelicalism. Which kind of, er… So it’s Protestant faith, it’s evangelical in that there’s a priority of trying to reach people with the gospel, spreading that message. So in terms of like what we believe, it would come under the kind of like a creed, if you look at like any evangelical creed that’s mainly what we think. So obviously your essentials from your Nicene creed or whatever, that God is a Trinity, Jesus was fully man and fully God, erm, that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. We need to apply context and understanding of literary genres to it in terms of our understanding and understanding of the time that it was written in, but that all of the Bible is God-breathed, and is inspired, and we should be using that. [pause] Yeah, I suppose that there’s one way to faith, that it’s through personal salvation, acceptance of Jesus. It’s grace not works. It’s a gift that you have to extend your faith for, em… So I think those are the kind of, you know, the primary things. Upholding the Bible as central. Which I suspect… do you know my mind’s gone blank with the evangelical tenets, but I have a feeling that the centrality of Scripture is one of them and then the reaching out with the gospel is another. But yeah, definitely holding the Scriptures as central and em recognising who Jesus is, and what he’s done for salvation would be kind of like the real core core things.

INTERVIEWER: I’m trying to think how to phrase this but, how has that been challenged in your mission work, or when have you had to really hold onto things and say “no – this is what I believe”?

RUTH: yeah. In general and certainly in teams and things I think that we have generally worked with people who’ve held to those same values. And so therefore they haven’t been challenged a lot in that kind of area. I mean one example that’s coming to mind but it isn’t so much on the mission field, it’s in a UK church when I was working with a guy who was having challenges in his faith and I was kind of like really working with him. And I really got a lot of challenges and I understood where he was coming from with a lot of his questions. But he got further and further away from believing that the Bible was something inspired by God and and and … I was surprised at that. This was a while ago. He was somebody who I felt had been very strongly, em, believed in the Bible, em… and so I continued to, you know, would never stop me from you know, wanting to work with somebody. But in the end we started to come from such different… I do think that how you view Scripture does affect your foundational worldview. Em. And it’s kind of, if you’re kind of, ok well I believe the Scriptures and yet as I say with all the caveats I’ve tried to understand what is a parable, what is a proverb, and understanding the genres and the histories – I do think you need to have that, because I do think that sometimes with Western eyes we misinterpret Scripture at times. But if you are still believing the centrality of that and everything comes out of that, then it gives you something to always fall back on. Whereas for this guy, he kind of like, the more he stopped believing in the Bible, it seemed to me, the more he was kind of, he didn’t know kind of where he was or what he believed or anything. It kind of took away that kind of foundation for him. But I mean, that doesn’t really answer your question… I’m trying to think if there’s any time when it’s really been challenged. I mean, I suppose it’s smaller things that are constantly challenged. Rather than those really core things. Like with the [Country G] / [Country H] / [ECE Country F] conference that I ran, you know, so then it was really bringing in some really good godly people in these places, but so racist at times. And kind of then really talking to them about unity and about the fact that we’re all made in the image of God. And kind of challenging that racism and those underlying values, which wasn’t an easy thing to do. So, you know, those were people we were working alongside that we kind of felt we had to come in and say something. I think we’ve had to come in and try and hold to what we felt were biblical values, like that value that we are all equally made in the image of God, that there isn’t any race obviously that’s got any advantage or loved any more than any other. You know, it’s trying to bring those biblical values out to the people we’re working with. I wouldn’t say that I personally have ever felt challenged over those beliefs, in terms of my mission work. So I don’t know if I’ve quite…

INTERVIEWER: it was just something that, as you said it, I thought, well what does that actually look like?

RUTH: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Lastly, just how and how much do you use social media?

RUTH: Yep. So, it’s the kind of thing that I’m not doing very well at the moment. And I’m constantly having chats with S that we really need to get ourselves sorted on this. And, in fact, we discussed it yesterday. So, I think it is something that’s necessary. Well, I won’t say necessary. I think that’s a word too far. I think that it’s something that is a very useful tool in missions. For connection: connection with supporting churches, supporting individuals, connection with people on the field, connection when you’re living abroad. The second time I was out in Africa we did have a little bit of internet, it wasn’t very good. But it was useable. First time we had nothing apart from I went on once a day to go dial up and it downloaded all the messages for that day, which could only be words and nothing else. So whilst living in [Country B] the second time, the fact that obviously we could communicate with some of our friends and family back home with social media, and we could see what they were up to and see pictures, I do think that sometimes helped with home sickness and so on. Obviously there’s a lot of places I do think social media you have to be really really wise. Because there’s a lot of countries – and I don’t just mean closed countries, although obviously it’s particularly so with a closed country – there’s a lot of countries where if you’re kind of putting out “I’m reaching these people for Jesus” that actually you could raise alarm bells. In which case I do think there needs to be a lot of wisdom with social media. I think when to use it and when not to. But I think that’s the case in general. I mean, I get really frustrated. There’s a couple of guys in my church and they all put out all kinds of controversial statements on social media about different social issues. And to me that doesn’t do anything. That doesn’t achieve anything. All it does is create antagonism and things. Personally I think wisdom is always needed in social media, in terms of how you communicate with people. I would like to tell you that I’m being really good and I’m making sure that I’m using it regularly to update people on what I’m doing and connecting with any supporters and that. But to be honest I’m not. At the minute, I’m posting probably every month or something, once a month. And it’s just kind of on my family or what I’m up to with my kids, as opposed to anything to do with my mission work. But we do do is we do try to communicate with anybody and particularly anybody who supports us, whether that’s financially or in prayer or some other way. We do try and make sure that we communicate with them personally. And, in terms of our discussion yesterday, that’s something that we want to increase a lot more of. I really believe in partnership for the gospel and kind of when Paul talks about being partners. And when, em, yeah, it’s even when Paul’s on his missionary journeys he’s writing letters to churches he’s been to and even churches he’s not been to. You know, he’s communicating with people. They’re sending people to him, whether that’s Epaphroditus with his wallet of money, or whatever. I do think that that communication with people is important. I don’t think a missionary should be a lone-ranger. I think that they need to constantly remember that they are part of a body. And it’s the whole Romans 10 thing of, how can they hear unless somebody preaches? And how can they preach unless they go? And how can someone go unless they’re sent? And I think that whole kind of sending partnership with the missionary shouldn’t be underestimated and I think that we need to make a lot more of that. So I think we’ve tried to do that in our way because we believe in that principle, but I think that we’ve got room for improvement and I think a lot of people have got room for improvement in that.

INTERVIEWER: Thanks. I think I’ll leave it there. Thank you.

…

*[Conversation continued, so I began recording again…]*

RUTH: A lot of the missionaries [denomination] has got at the minute… and just to help you out… [denomination] mission is not a sending agency. We, em, we are a couple of different things. We’re a resource for people. So we’ve got a lot of people on the team who’ve got expertise in a number of different areas and we’re connected in with a lot of different people who can do things, whether that’s training, debriefing, insurance, NHS advice. You know, we can do a lot of those things for people. And we can do accreditation, ministerial status and things. But a lot of our missionaries will be with an organisation as well. Not all of them. But a lot will be with at least one organisation. Yeah. A lot of the guys we have on the field – and it’s something we’ve talked about as an issue – is of the older side of things. I don’t mean *old*; but kind of, you know, I’m kind of at the young end at 40. So, em, which I think’s sad in some ways, but it’s kind of how it is. We need to work on that. But yes I’ll definitely keep an eye out for people.

INTERVIEWER: Have you got any ideas what the issues are? Why that might be? Are people talking about why?

RUTH: I think missions has changed so much in the last number of years. Because the other problem that we’re having is missionaries being able to get into churches to raise support. So when we first started out as missionaries, we could do - you’d definitely have a Sunday morning service, you’d definitely have a Sunday evening service, and in some places there’d be an afternoon service. So you could go between like three churches on the same day. They’d have like a mid-week Bible study or something as well. So you could go to… there’s quite a lot of options for meetings to go to. Whereas now, a huge majority of churches only have a Sunday morning service. One or two only have a Sunday evening or a Sunday afternoon service. So there’s immediately a massive decrease in the number of services.

INTERVIEWER: that’s interesting.

RUTH: And I think also, because maybe travel is more accessible and things, I think some churches are maybe sending their own people out, even if it’s on short-term things, rather than wanting to connect to a missionary in the long term. Erm, what else? There was something else I thought of a second ago and it’s gone. Oh, and then the big organisations. So a lot of churches that I speak to in [denomination], they do a lot more of the, say, the child sponsorship, say with Compassion or One by One, or one of these big organisations. They will maybe sponsor a child. And they will use their missions budget on that rather than sponsoring a missionary. So I think some of these things, I think that then impacts obviously on the generation growing up, that they see a different aspect of missions. Whereas, I think, even by my time – and I’m obviously at the older end of your group. Certainly people older than me, they will remember very clearly missionary services, where missionaries came in. We don’t have anything quite like that any more. So I think that is impacting on the next generation. I think they’re just, yeah, they don’t have that inspiration.

INTERVIEWER: they’re not seeing the examples in the same way?

RUTH: yeah, exactly.

INTERVIEWER: that’s interesting.

RUTH: so I do think that kind of impacts. And I think there’s much more of an angling towards short-term things. And that isn’t just in missions. I think that’s a life thing. I’m obviously living in an area that’s a steel-working, coal-mining area. You know, where the culture was you got a job and you have that job for life. And not only that, but then your kids got the same job and they had that job for life. And obviously that has changed so much. People have a much more transient way of thinking. It’s much more: I’m in this job, but there’s no expectation that they’ll be in that job in ten years. And I think that that then carries over onto the mission field, that they kind of… somebody’s going out for a gap year somewhere, they’re doing a two-year here, but they’re not doing seven years, ten years, fifteen years. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: OK. Thank you.