**Interview 005 Pseudonym: Ian**

*NOTE: for security reasons had to be careful about language used and had to avoid talking about current work and location*

INTERVIEWER: So, can you just confirm for me that you’ve read the information that I sent about the study and that you’re happy to go ahead with the interview.

IAN: I have read it and I’m happy to go ahead. I just realised I haven’t sent you back the form which I’ll do directly after this.

INTERVIEWER: Great, that’s no problem. Just to start off with, can you tell me a bit about your faith history?

IAN: Yeah, my background as a … I grew up in a Christian family, so I’ve always kind of gone to church, thought of myself as a Christian. My background is Baptist, kind of independent evangelical Baptist tradition. So, I was always kind of taught “you’re not just a Christian because your parents are; you’ve got to make a personal decision.” So I kind of grew up with that awareness. Over time, I don’t have a kind of particular point of having made a special commitment but there have been several important phases over my childhood and early adulthood which led me into personal faith.

INTERVIEWER: so, at what point did you move away from your parents, how did that affect your faith and your journey?

IAN: ehm, so I lived with my parents until I went to university. So at the age of 18. Em. I think I was reasonably strong in my faith already, before then. But obviously when you leave home you have to settle things for yourself. And so … er.. it becomes more personal in that you’re having to decide, oh I’m going out to look for a church to be part of, you know, I’m going to be part of the Christian Union and that sort of thing. So, yeah. But there was never any question in my mind that that’s what I would do. Em… so yeah. I think… the… the bigger transition for me had in a sense already started when I was living at home and continued when I was at university, which was just starting to broaden my horizons a little bit. Ask questions about, you know, why is it this way? My background is pretty conservative. So in my teenage years, you know, I was starting to ask questions like, why are Catholics bad? [laughter] Why do we, you know, believe this and not that, and so on…. And obviously going to university I came in to contact with lots more different traditions and so that kind of continued a process of em… I was going to say divergence from what I grew up with…. I don’t think I have actually particularly diverged from it, but I have broadened. I’m ready to be more accepting of a wider range of possibilities. Rather than the fairly strict party line that I was brought up with.

INTERVIEWER: So did you stay within the same tradition in terms of the church you attended?

IAN: Essentially yes. The churches I’ve gone to subsequently are perhaps slightly less conservative but still very much on the conservative end of the spectrum.

INTERVIEWER: So, who do you think have been the models in your faith?

IAN: Em… Well I guess my parents, obviously, would have played an important role in that. I think the pastor in my church as I grew up. He was somebody that I very much respected – I’m still in contact with actually. Em. I don’t think I was consciously modelling myself on people, but I think those people would have

INTERVIEWER: people that have had an influence…

IAN: right… very influential. By nature I connect with authority figures. And so, you know, I’ll look at who’s the person that’s in charge and kind of instinctively just following them. So, yeah, it’s going to be parents and pastors. Yeah. Church leaders are people I’ve just instinctively followed.

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

IAN: em. Yeah. It’s a very good question. I keep asking myself! In one sense there’s a very simple answer cos I had a very direct calling when I was at university. I was in my third year at university and em I was you know getting to that point when I was starting to think well what do I do with the rest of my life, and, em, one day I was praying about it, and I prayed that very foolish prayer: God, you know, what do you want me to do? I don’t mind what it is or where it is, just let me know. And right at that moment I felt a very strong impression of a call to the country where I’m now working. And there was no obvious reason why that would be. I hadn’t particularly had em a sense of calling to go overseas previously. I consider myself the least linguistically gifted person in my family. I’d never met a person from this country, not that I was aware of anyway. I had no direct connection at all. But for some reason God put this country suddenly on my heart. And so, I spent a long time wondering if I was just going crazy and getting voices in my head. It wasn’t the first time that I’d had that kind of experience. Em, and I’d kind of learnt, you know, kind of test the spirits and see whether they’re from God. Just, you know, does it sound like something that God might have said? Is it consistent with everything else that I know? Doors just kept on opening. So you know, here I am, some fifteen, sixteen years later still following that same path.

I didn’t come out immediately, actually. I did a few exploratory trips. And after…

INTERVIEWER: Was that kind of on your own or…?

IAN: Yeah. Well the first one was with an organisation, the organisation I’m now with actually. But not to this country, it was to another country in the region. Just to kind of test out am I, do I have a sense of call to overseas stuff at all, and that seemed positive. And then I made a couple of individual trips to this country. And I did another trip to another country in the region as well. And it was on that fourth trip that I felt that God was saying, yep, your call is definitely confirmed, em, that’s where you’re headed, but you’re not going yet. So go home, get yourself some more experience and qualifications, get embedded in a church that you’ll have a long-term relationship with and will support you. And don’t come back until you’re called. So, I did. So I went home again and I went into teaching. I was already kind of pursuing that line of thinking already. But it was just kind of confirmed. So I went into teaching. And I taught in UK secondary schools for about six years. And, yeah, at about the end of my fifth year I sensed that God was saying, ok now is the time. Get moving. So I started putting things in place and … did a little bit of Bible college. I did a CELTA course as well because I’d been doing a little bit of English teaching out here. And those kind of things. And then came out.

INTERVIEWER: So you’re with an organisation. Are you in a city then, are you rural? I’m not going to ask much…

IAN: right now I’m in a city. The team that I’m with operate in different parts of the country. I’m actually doing something a little bit different at the moment in that I’m doing some further study. So, yeah, hence I just moved here. But because my connection is in teaching, so, yeah, I’m probably likely to be city based. I have been up to now anyway, in different cities.

INTERVIEWER: so how have you found living in a different culture?

IAN: Yeah. I haven’t really found it problematic. [pause] In some ways, in some ways I never fully felt I fitted in at home anyway. So coming to another culture and not feeling I fit in is, one, it’s kind of normal and two, I’m not expected to fit in because I’m a foreigner here. So that in some ways kind of makes it easier. So obviously there are, there are challenges of knowing the language, challenges of you know just cultural things being different, so different attitudes. I’m in a country which is fixated with masks at the moment because of coronavirus.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, of course. I’m currently worried that my son’s fourth birthday party is going to have to be cancelled! How do you explain to a four year old.

IAN: it hasn’t been cancelled – you say you’re just worried

INTERVIEWER: they say they’re going to bring in new measures…

IAN: But there’s quite a difference in the approach of the Westerners and the local people here as to things like masks. Cos all the English news, it’s saying, unless you’re in a hospital setting or actually ill yourself or in contact with other people who are ill, masks are really making very little difference. And everyone going out buying masks is probably preventing people who need them getting them. So the Westerners have kind of got that view and the local people are like, you’ve got to wear a mask, you’ve got to wear a mask. And we’re kind of caught in the, you know, we want to be culturally appropriate, but on the other hand, you know, the information we’re getting in English is different to what the local people are saying. You know, that kind of cultural challenge. But nothing that’s particularly been terribly difficult for me I don’t think.

INTERVIEWER: How do you think Britishness is viewed? Has that been an issue at all? How are you seen as a Brit?

IAN: Interesting. I’m in a place where there are not very many British people. Americans, North Americans, are more generally known. And, you know, there’s a smattering of Europeans around. Britishness and British English has a kind of novelty value. But… by and large, I haven’t noticed it being viewed especially positively or negatively. [pause]

INTERVIEWER: Just different.

IAN: Just different. British are gentlemen. So I often get people saying “ah, gentleman!” Yeah, possibly a sense of kind of cleverness as well. I think that’s the stereotype. But for most of my friends I’m probably the first British person they’ve met or certainly had any serious contact with.

INTERVIEWER: Are you there on your own? Do you have family?

IAN: No, I’m single. I’m part of a team and there are other team members in the same city. But in terms of my living situation it’s just me.

INTERVIEWER: How is it in team? How do you find team life and team work?

IAN: Em. The nature of our team is that we’re quite disparate actually. It’s just the nature of the work that we’re involved in that, em, it’s kind of quite individual. So different people are kind of focussed in different things. You know, some people are interested in agriculture, others are interested in medicine, other kinds of development work. There’s a few of us who are kind of in an education kind of stream. Em. The city where I am now is actually our base for where we do language study, so all the other people on the team in my city are actually people who have recently joined the field and who are still doing their language study. So that’s a slightly different dynamic from being with other parts of the team. Em. I think we get on, you know, we get on fine. It’s an international team as well, so of course that has certain challenges. But yeah, we get on pretty well and we support each other quite well.

INTERVIEWER: Good. How are you supported in terms of finance, prayer, practical things?

IAN: Yeah. In terms of finance, em, I have one main sending church, which gives me about 40% of my support. And I’ve got a number of individual supporters within that church which is probably another 20% or so. Em, I’ve got a couple of other smaller supporting churches and a range of family and friends who give. So, because I’m with an organisation they’re able to kind of give to the organisation and the money is sent on to me. Prayer support is kind of organised in much the same way. I’ve got several churches who name me as a person that they pray for and quite a few individual friends and family or people that I’ve been connected with through the organisation who have an interest in my country. Yeah. I send out monthly newsletters.

INTERVIEWER: How do you go about taking major decisions, something like taking your role or your location, or even when you started out?

IAN: I always like to er – oh my computer’s just doing something strange… ok, that’s ok… erm… I always like to have as much information as I can before making a decision. So I will you know scout out what are the different options. I will have talked with relevant people, especially team leaders and relevant team colleagues to get their opinions, their advice, permission if need be. Em, I will usually have… I’m quite a kind of big-picture long-term kind of thinker, so I will usually have a range of possible futures in my mind and I’m kind of scouting out, right which one seems the best and what do I need in order to get there? I’m not kind of fixed in “oh it’s got to be this.” I’m ready to change if circumstances change, but, em, I think normally at first I have a lot of uncertainty and I’ll go round trying to gather more information and talk with more people and, you know, think about it some more, you know, push on some doors and see if they open or if they remain shut and so on. And at some point, somehow a kind of sense of peace about one of the directions tends to settle and that’s where I go.

INTERVIEWER: Would you say your faith has been challenged in any way by what you’re doing and where you are?

IAN: I’ll answer that in a couple of different ways. There are certainly many faith challenges. To what extent those faith challenges are brought on by being here and to what extent they’re just the ordinary things that anyone would face, I’m not sure. I’m not convinced that being here is particularly more challenging than being back home. [pause] I think the challenges. The biggest faith challenges I have are about disappointment with the church or with Christians. And with myself at times. But not living out what we say we believe. I think that’s the biggest challenge I have. In my, in my early to mid-twenties I went through some times of having big kind of intellectual challenges, you know, dealing with kind of atheism. In England I have a philosophy background and I taught religious studies and philosophy. So I’m the kind of person that kind of challenges and questions and is constantly encountering other ways of looking at things. And sometimes they sound more plausible than, you know, the ways that I was taught. So I did have intellectual doubts for some while. But towards my kind of mid- to later twenties, I kind of came into a more settled position of “I can’t know for sure, but on the available evidence that I have, I’m pretty confident that 1. I think Jesus probably is the truth and the way to follow and 2. Even if he’s not, I actually think following him is probably better than the various other ways that are on offer. So, I wouldn’t say I’ve kind of resolved the intellectual doubts, but they don’t bother me. But yeah. In the last ten years or so, the really big challenges to me have been, you know, we say we believe this but actually we spend an awful lot of time looking as though we’re not particularly different from the rest of the world. So where’s the power? It’s that kind of thing. So, does that come through in things that I’ve seen being in the field? Certainly. But I think it would have been just as true if I was living at home.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have a plan for the future? How long do you see yourself staying?

IAN: My sense of calling to here is a life-time calling. I’m always open to God’s leading to do whatever and whenever. But my impression has always been it’s a calling for life. I don’t have specific plans for exactly what I want to be doing, em, but again I want to be open to God’s leading. It’s also the kind of field where things change a lot. It’s quite difficult to predict what might be possible to do in five or ten years’ time. So there are, you know, there are things that I would love to be doing but it’s just not possible. But who knows, things might be completely different ten years from now. My nature is as a thinker, as a philosopher, as an educator. So at the moment I’m doing kind of study and I’m kind of opening up a kind of research arm for our team, trying to understand the country and the culture better and think strategically about how we might reach in the future. So for the short to medium term future, I think I’ll continue to be in that kind of role. But things, if the situation changes a lot and I was able to get in on the ground and actually be connecting with people in a maybe pastoral kind of setting or something like that, then, you know, I’d be open to that.

INTERVIEWER: How and how much do you use social media?

IAN: Not much. It varies quite a bit from place to place. Different cities in my region have very different security outlooks. So the place where I am at the moment, I can use social media relatively freely. But to be honest, I was never the kind of person who was particularly into social media anyway. You know, I never had a Facebook account. I was never particularly into those kind of things. So, it wasn’t a big loss to find out that I was in a place where I couldn’t use them. When I was teaching for a couple of years, I was in another city where it’s rather tighter so I didn’t have anything except email and even then I was quite careful.

INTERVIEWER: So how do you communicate with friends and family? Is it mainly email?

IAN: Yes. That’s my most common way. With local friends here I use Whatsapp or local equivalents, but friends back home it’s email. And close friends and family some Skype.

INTERVIEWER: How do you think your friends and family view what you’re doing?

IAN: Pretty supportive actually. I … when I first told my parents where I was planning to go, em, they were a little surprised but not massively in some ways. They kind of thought about it a bit and they were like, yeah, ok, that makes sense. Thankfully I am from a family where we’re content to live separately. We get on fine but we don’t live in each other’s pockets. So, em, yeah, there wasn’t that… When I talk to other people, a lot of people have big problems either for themselves leaving because they wanted to be with their family or – especially the girls – the family saying ‘oh, we don’t want you to go’. And especially people who are married with children. It’s the parents saying, ‘you can’t take my grandchildren away.’ So in that sense I’m blessed both with my family background and the fact that … my older brother and sister are already married with children. So I wasn’t kind of…

INTERVIEWER: there’s not so much pressure

IAN: There wasn’t pressure there. Yeah. Friends…. Similarly. I’m the kind of person that, em, if I’m good friends with somebody then I can maintain that friendship equally well at a distance, you know. And I’ve never particularly had a very large number of friendships anyway. You know, I have a few fairly close friends that I stay in touch with regularly, and the people who were more kind of acquaintances. They stay in touch occasionally and many of them may receive my newsletter, em, and I’ll see them when I go home. But it’s not like a big wrench that I can’t see them all the time.

INTERVIEWER: That’s all I had to ask.

IAN: cool

INTERVIEWER: unless there’s anything you particularly think I’ve missed?