

Greg: Hi, Greg Parsons here with the second episode as a follow-up to Urbana 18 the Urbana communication folks and I have teamed up to put together interviews like this. I hope you enjoyed the first interview with Jason who served with his wife in India for five years. Have you thought of doing something like that for a year or two after graduation? It's an ideal time to get out there and see where God might lead. If you want to hear more stories and issues on a new podcast, I'm starting that. Hang on to the very end and we'll share more details. Today though, we're going to hear from two of InterVarsity staff. So this first one is Ruth Hubbard, who as she told us has the best job in the world, running Urbana. Listen for the way God moved Ruth into things she could have never imagined. Those are her words. Through events, circumstances, and people investing in her life, and you'll also see her heart for you: college students today. Note that her major in college was graphic design and listen for what she shares is a relational characteristic of people who succeed. Let's dive right in.

Ruth: So my name is Ruth Hubbard and I am InterVarsity's vice president for Urbana. So, Urbana is my full time job and I've been serving with InterVarsity and in this role for just over two years. So I'm new to the organization, but I've been a participant and an exhibitor at Urbana conferences. So this is my sixth Urbana to attend, but my first time on as InterVarsity staff.

Greg: Okay, well where, what campuses/connections did you have before?

Ruth: So I've was never on, I wasn't involved with InterVarsity when I was in college. I knew people in InterVarsity and came to Urbana in 1987. I had already graduated from school, but, was looking at missions, and was a teacher (had served in China the summer before with the English Language Institute of China). And, thought that I would come to Urbana and God could properly call me into global missions cause, you know, like I'm willing.

Ruth: So of course he's going to do that. And, he asked me to put down roots right where I was. And so I taught American literature at a suburban Christian High School in Indiana for a total of 11 years. And it was very apparent that that's where God wanted me. And then moved from there into a role on a staff with the church for just a few years, a particularly important transition stage in my own life. So God had me there in part to care for me. While my mom was dying and it was a long process of her death. And so it was a community that could come around me in ways that students and other faculty just don't have the same kind of capacity for. But it was also a church that is deeply involved in global missions. And so I was with missionaries, around missionaries, and began to see that there were ways that my graphic design and journalism skills could serve missionaries in particular as part of a kingdom.

Ruth: I began to have a dream that I was going to help missionaries tell their story in ways that would connect better with a media-saturated generation. I desperately wanted people to still hear their stories and was afraid that they were, people were tuning out, young people particularly, tuning out. And so there was that, that seed of a love for how

do we bring young people to a place of truth and to know who God is and to want to serve with him. Which was greatly by my years as a teacher of high school. And then after four years on staff at that church, I went to Urbana again. I was still on staff. I'll never forget the week that I went to our senior pastor and I said, "Brian, I would like to go to Urbana. It's that week between Christmas and New Years, the church office is practically closed.

Ruth: I don't quite have enough vacation days left to go. But would that be okay?" And he looked at me and he said, "Ruth, that's not vacation time. We love Urbana. We love missions. You're going to go; we're going to cover all the expenses for it." I said, "Brian, you know that if I go, there's a very good chance I'm going to come back and tell you that I'm resigning my role." And he said, "We're not building the kingdom on the corner of 95th and College in Indianapolis. We're part of a kingdom. I expect that that's what's going to happen." So went to Urbana 2000 and came home with what I thought were three ways that God might be directing me. And so ask a group of friends to come together with me and discernment, set a date. And I said, "By this date I'm going to begin an application process with one of these."

Ruth: And then God can redirect at that point if he wants to. I trust that he can do those things. My desire is to follow him, but, but I have to set a date because I know myself well enough that I could analyze things for seven years and never, never get anywhere. And God led me to Wycliffe Bible translators who I served for 14 years.

Greg: Oh wow. And where did you serve?

Ruth: I served in the U S office in Orlando, Florida. So after they made the move to Orlando. Went there as a graphic designer, and to be a part of the communications that would, that had been, there was a bit of that that had been moving up in me and that's where my undergrad work had been. And then over the course of five years, I kept moving into some leadership roles and was eventually invited to be part of the executive team and served as a senior vice president and chief culture officer for Wycliffe for about nine years.

Greg: Wow. So how did the next transition go then?

Ruth: God in his great mercy put us in a place in Wycliffe where the recruitment department was working hard to manage the number of events that they went to; that did or did not actually move people into missions...how do we make sure that we're really mobilizing people and not just showing up with a table everywhere anybody invites us to. And so they'd set a set of criteria and when they analyzed the expense of sending people for the number of days that are Urbana is, and for the number of people at that point (this would have been 2007-2008 so it would have been 2006 that we were actually joining the organization within the first couple of years after the event). It didn't meet the criteria that they'd set for themselves. And so they were ready to say "We were not

going to our Urbana,” and one of the other senior vice presidents and I looked at each other and go, that's not acceptable.

Ruth: There's something about Urbana that's beyond the sort of recruitment ROI. It has to be more than that. But this team is committed to that thing and we've asked them to do that. We need to reposition Urbana. And so in order to do that, we did what many smaller organizations will do and probably larger ones too, is we moved Urbana into the president's office and said, let's experiment with it. We have the agency and the courage to make changes with a thing and fail in ways that others might not feel the agency to do that. And so I began to be the person who brought Wycliffe's teams to Urbana and worked the exhibit hall for the last 3 Urbanas and loved that. Add to that Tom Lynn, current President for InterVarsity, but the Director for Urbana for '12 and '15 served on Wycliffe's board of directors.

Ruth: And so over the period of time that I was in my executive leadership role, he was on the board. We got to know Tom and Nancy really well. Tom saw my sort of fanatic love for Urbana and what God does in this space and invited me to some things and around things. And so I was part of a small advisory group for '15. I got to peek behind the curtain a little bit. And so, I really do believe that God used all of those things so that when an opportunity came after Urbana 15, that the position was going to be opened up and moved into something separate from the Director for Missions (it had been a dual role) for the first time in 10 years or more. When one of those opportunities came up, the spirit inside of me said, I have this for you; and God and I had the conversation.

Ruth: If you're saying that I have this job, this makes me very nervous right now. He said, “No, I'm saying I want you to go for it and hold it up. Hold your hands open. This might not be what I have for you, but I want you to full on, go for this and then let me trust me with whatever would happen. And so again, went through a discernment process to come to that place and God allowed that to be.

Greg: Let me shift now a little bit to this generation of students. What do you feel like are the challenges that mission agencies would want to know about bringing students in as they see God leading them? What do they need to know to be able to help them the best?

Ruth: I'm sure there are many, many things and in about three hours I'll have one and I'll go, oh my goodness, this is a great thing to share there.

Ruth: But, one of the things that I would say to missions agencies and leaders in them who are trying to decide their process is the life that these students have lived. The things that they've seen and experienced, the pressures that they've been under in the world that they live in are different than any of the generations that have gone before them. And we have to grow to understand what all that means. We have to understand what it means to grow up and to go to university. When I went to college, the life

experience I had compared to the life experience the students have is so different. A really simple illustration of that is when I realized what these students have seen just on television commercials, if all their watches professional sports on TV related to sexually explicit material, some of the things that are running as TV commercials on Sunday afternoon at three o'clock would have been pornography when I was in high school.

Ruth: And so we have weighted students down in many ways with a lot of heavy adult kinds of things way before their time. And then, in a desire to protect them from all kinds of dangerous things have, the description is bubble wrapped and helicopter parented. And so they come overly prepared in some areas and underly prepared and others. And it's not by their choice; this is how they have been raised up. And so how do we come alongside a generation, develop the beautiful things in them, the ways that God has created them, even in the midst of that, and find ways to help them grow and develop so that they become confident, and secure in who God is. I think statistics tell us there's more mental illness; there's more instances of depression. We have to find ways to talk about those things that are not stigmatized.

Ruth: I believe we have to make plans within our systems to serve a community of people who don't try to fake that they're not broken. I think there was probably a good bit of depression and mental illness in my generation, but we were so good at glossing it over that you either faked it ,or you faked it for a while and then imploded. So I think there's some healthy things about this, but agencies are going to have to figure out how to serve well.

Greg: Kind of meshing some of that with your story. When you got out of college, you wanted to be a graphic artist or something like that, I assume. You did that some; it morphed into other things. Sometimes people come out with a clear vision and yet they really are only 22 you know, how do you mesh helping people work with their gifting and live in what God is calling them to and yet realizing they haven't learned...I mean, could you imagine yourself in this position back then? How did you process that?

Ruth: So, for me, it was coming to a place where I was okay with not knowing the whole thing; and I believe God in His grace led me through crisis points like He does with all of us. He brings us to a point of crisis where we have to go, okay, who is this God that I trust and what does He really say about me and my future? And can I even receive it as a blessing that I don't know tomorrow; that He's only asking me to follow him today; and that my desire is to do that everyday for the rest of my life. But today, in this place, can I learn to be obedient in this thing? I believe that's why when I hoped that I'd get called into global missions as a 25 year old, part of God's "No" to me was that He needed me to learn obedience in the smaller things, in the plain, ordinary, everyday things.

Ruth: Because He knew that the way I was skilled, the things that I could do, that I could get up front and I could do that kind of a ministry thing and be absolutely hollow on the inside. And he said, "Nope, I need, I need to grow you here." And so in many ways, what can we do for a generation? Walk alongside; mentor. All the statistics tell us that those young people, junior high and high school and college students who have had

relationships with adults have a much higher probability of being successful sooner because they've had people speaking into their lives and loving them and listening to them and not just telling them they're broken. But standing on the sidelines to say I'm broken too. And our Jesus loves us and is faithful to himself and to us.

Greg: It's obvious, isn't it? That God works in strange ways. And does things that we could never see before they happen. But let's listen to another story. While I was at Urbana recording these interviews, I talked with Tom Lynn, the President of InterVarsity. Tom ran Urbana in 2012 and 2015 and then became President of InterVarsity USA. Be sure and listen to the lessons he learned when he attended Urbana, and for his suggestions for you coming out of Urbana 18. Before Tom was president, he was . . .well, I'll let him tell you...

Tom:...before that I was the director of their Urbana student missions conference.

Greg: And before that?

Tom: Before that I was a missionary in Mongolia. My wife and I were directing, student ministry in Mongolia with, IFES, our global sister movement.

Greg: So how did you end up in Mongolia?

Tom: We end up in Mongolia actually as a result of Urbana in many ways. Urbana give us a calling in our lives and as we discerned where the Lord might have us, we were very open. We did a lot of discernment processes, praying, researching, asking partners overseas, where should we go? And the one thing we were sure about is we want to do student ministry. And we were involved with campus ministry after graduation and served on staff with InterVarsity for awhile. And so as we looked at the sort of the lay of the land where could we do campus ministry in a place that was needed, that wanted North Americans to serve, that would fit us well and long story, eventually we landed in Mongolia.

Greg: How long were you there?

Tom: We were there for four years.

Greg: So Madison isn't too bad now weather-wise.

Tom: Madison's not too bad, you know, it's pretty warm, relatively speaking. Mongolia is cold, negative 40 degrees in the winter, and winter actually lasts from end of September to May. So it was pretty long.

Greg: Now when you think back to graduation from college, can you imagine doing what you're doing now as a 22 year old?

Tom: Never could have imagined it. You know, it never really thought, you know, five years out, 10 years out. Actually, I just was living year by year, day by day and wanting to serve however I could. Certainly as a young freshman coming into college, I definitely didn't think I would end up doing anything related to ministry at all. So God really met me in college and turned my heart towards thinking about how could I use the skills and things that he'd given me for his purposes. And for me it was full time vocational ministry. But yeah, even at that time, even as a young graduate of college serving in ministry, I would have never imagined I'd be doing what I'm doing today either. But I think it's just a step by step process of being faithful and following where God leads.

Greg: So that maybe is the answer to the next question, which is "What would you suggest students do as a takeaway from Urbana?" Obviously any given student may have a certain thing God is leading them in and you and I don't know that, but what are the more general things that you feel would be crucial for them to process through and to walk away with?

Tom: Two really key things for students to walk away with. One is immediate application is number one. Whatever they experienced here that they believe God is calling them to follow up on or whatever long-term call they may have received from the Lord here...What does immediate application look like? So if it's about reaching an unreached people group, how can you do that on your campus immediately? If it's about being bolder in your witness and sharing the Gospel, how can you do it the first time you get home? Maybe it's someone in your family. What does immediate application look like? I've seen so many students over the years delay and say, "Well God called me to do that, but I'm really not going to do anything about that for four more years," and by then it's too late. They're going to lose that sense of passion. And commitment towards following through. So I think that's the first thing.

Tom: The second is don't do it alone. I think that's the thing is coming out of an Urbana, making sure that you have a few people that can walk alongside you in the commitments you've made. So whether it's someone at Urbana with you (hopefully someone came to Urbana with you and a student maybe) whether it's a classmate or a mentor...to make sure that that person keeps you accountable after you leave Urbana. And if it's someone that's not there, it's someone who's ready at home waiting, and their whole job is to ask you questions and make sure that you process what you've learned, debrief with you, ask you good questions, keep you accountable. I think those are two very key things that I would say, after the conference is important to do.

Greg: Let me back up in a sense a little and ask you who were ,not necessarily specific people though you could be, but what was it like for you to have mentors speak into your

life at that stage of finishing college and/or transitioning from Mongolia to IV staff, Urbana to President?

Tom: Yeah, those mentors were very important. I would say, for me, as an InterVarsity student, it was my campus minister, my staff within InterVarsity. But, over the years it's been different people. I've had the former President of InterVarsity, ironically, he spoke into my life at various times. His name was Steve Hainer and he's passed since. Folks like Leighton Ford is a mentor right now. He still speaks into my life. People still speak into my life now. I think what comes to mind is when I was a young student coming out of my first Urbana – Urbana 93, and I made the decision to go into full time vocational ministry. My parents were not happy with that decision. And so they, in fact, it was very challenging. I had a very challenging family situation. I could not have made those steps and followed through if it weren't for the mentors in the community that supported me through it. So I can name a lot of names, but in the end, just having a group of people who were walking with me every step of the way through challenges like family was very crucial in my life. And in almost every decision, major decision I've made, the mentors have not just giving me advice, but then supported me when I made a certain decision. And that's been really important.

Greg: So what does immediate application look like in your life? What is that first step for you? Have you taken it yet?

Greg: And what does, “Don't do it alone” look like to you?

Greg: Is there someone who will help keep you accountable to what you've committed to? Who's walking with you through this season of your life?

Greg: As a closing note, in my work with Frontier Ventures, I'm honored to travel around the world. And so for 25 years I've been doing that and interacting with global leaders – young and old. I've heard creative and challenging ideas that have helped them and I think might help you. So a few years ago I began to record interviews on specific themes and topics.

Greg: Now I'm putting those together in a new podcast that will cover things like: "Mobilization. What is it? Why do we do it", or "How not to share your faith with a Muslim", or "How does grief and loss fit into mission?"

Greg: It's my deep desire that these podcasts will engage, inform, and challenge you with cutting-edge global stories and Gospel spreading insights, past and present. It's launching in early 2019. You can follow me on Twitter @ParsonsgH or you'll see it announced at: www.frontierventures.org/blog where these Urbana-related podcasts are also posted. We'll have another one in a month. I hope you can listen in. Bye Bye.