



Center for Medical Missions

A ministry of Christian Medical & Dental Associations

July 2012

I just returned to the U.S. after spending a few weeks in Kenya. While I was there, I had an experience with a friend that helped set the focus for this month's edition of *Your Call*. I hope you enjoy our discussion of bribes and that it offers you some understanding and insight into the topic.

[Daniel Tolan](#)

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[Global Missions Health Conference](#) – November 8-10, 2012 in Louisville, Kentucky
Have you registered for this great conference yet? Join us at our booth in the CMDA section and be sure to introduce yourself! Visit www.medicalmissions.com for more information and to register. Bring this newsletter to our booth for a “free” treat for your sweet tooth.

[CMDA National Convention](#) – May 2-5, 2013 in Ridgecrest, Tennessee (near Asheville)
Put it on your calendar now to attend. Would you set a goal to attend your first convention? Invited three friends – conventions like this are so much more fun when you are with others you know. Can we make this the largest representation of young people ever at a national convention?

Book Review

Are you worried about the fundraising aspect of medical missions? Then you have got to read this! 90 pages, each page only 3.5 x 6.5 inches – it is small and reads quick.

If God Will Provide, Why Do We Have to Ask For Money? is an excellent short book by Rick Dunham with a forward by Chip Ingram. Do you see yourself “begging” for money or part of God’s financial plan if you are in missions? In a few short pages Dunham clearly lays out his thoughts on the reality and the battle of fundraising for Christian ministry. He titles this section, “The spiritual dynamics of fundraising.” He then lays out “A biblical model for fundraising” with biblical views on money, giving and asking.

His final thoughts end with:

- Clearly direct people where to give.
- Be willing to challenge people to give to the work God is doing through your ministry.
- Show donors the impact of their gifts in people’s lives.

Visit www.ifgodwillprovide.com for more information.

Bribes...To Pay or Not to Pay...This is the Question

by Daniel Tolan, MD

I was in traveling outside the U.S. last month and the bus was stopped by an officer at a police road-check. It is not unusual to see a driver’s license folder handed over containing both the license and “something small” like about \$2 in the local currency. No money was with the license and the officer looked for other reasons to ask questions. There was a very close friend of mine riding in the front passenger seat. He had taken his seatbelt off because he was getting off the bus about 100 yards further up the road to catch another bus to the capital city.

The officer, disgruntled because he had not received “something small,” told my friend he was arresting him for lack of seatbelt use. He was instructed to bring his personal effects. As he was unloading his small bag, he passed the money out of his wallet to another friend before getting off the bus. While this was happening, I stepped off the bus and asked the officer why he was arresting someone for such a minor offense instead of giving a warning. When he emphatically informed me he was doing his job to arrest my friend, I shot back just as emphatically, “No, that is not what is happening. I

know the protocol here!" I should have held my tongue until I had carefully chosen other words. Or should I have just handed over a couple dollars before I even spoke?

The situation escalated and I heard a mention of now "needing something more" – around \$25 to \$50. We walked about 10 minutes to a police post where the captain was "informed" of the situation including my "obstruction of justice." While I answered questions to the captain, my friend was taken into a back room and locked up. Later he told me he was asked directly for money by the officer and he was taken into the back room when he showed his wallet was empty.

Finally cooler heads prevailed. We were once again on our way but after almost a two-hour delay!

There is no question I wanted to lay out "something bigger" at times – say about \$50. I did not have anything in my wallet either or I might have! If I had been told to leave with my friend still locked up, I would have been very tempted to walk back to the bus to retrieve a significant amount of money to make the situation go away. Would it have been right or wrong? We traveled later than we wanted (after dark) because of the delay, putting us at much greater risk. We could have avoided this risk to 15 people if we had just passed over a couple dollars initially. Should we have? We were expected for lunch at a home of a local family who had prepared for months to welcome us. Now we were arriving late. Should we have paid and arrived on time?

I have never had to pay a "bribe," but I have been sorely tempted. Once, I went to 27 different offices over a period of two days to clear a washing machine from out of customs. Each office had to place the required stamp after some delay of time. I am sure if I had handed the first office about \$10, the matter would have been finished. What is the best use of resources - \$10 or two days of my time?

A family member of mine used to carry a cooler full of ice and Coca-Cola to give a "gift" to the border guards at one crossing. No crossing problems or delays and he would sit with the officers and drink his Coke at the same time! Remember the commercial that said "Coke Makes the World Go Round?" Was this a wrong use of a "gift?"

Missionaries face these issues all the time. Sometimes they are magnified though. A shipping container with equipment for new operating rooms, a CT scanner and other important items sat in port for 18 months waiting for clearance. Port storage fees built up to well over \$40,000. These fees were finally erased and nothing else was paid beyond the usual legal fees. Care was significantly delayed for sick patients while this was worked out. Could this have been avoided? Yes, a few hundred dollars would have

solved it all on day one. Should it have been done? Would it have been wrong or would it have actually been the “right” thing to do?

Well, I certainly don't have the answers to every situation you will face. Read on for more about bribes.

Bribes

by Ron Koteskey, PhD

Editor's note: Ron and Bonnie Koteskey are missionary care specialists. Visit their website at www.missionarycare.com for excellent resources.

Little about missionaries and bribes is readily available online, in printed periodicals or in published books. The Bible is not silent on the issue of bribery, but Christians have written little about it. Missionaries living in countries where bribery is common discuss it among themselves, but only a few have put their thoughts in writing.

Most mission agencies have no policy or guidelines about bribery. Therefore, missionaries have to make decisions about bribes on their own or with the advice of a few colleagues in the absence of much relevant thinking and information.

What is a “bribe?”

Two definitions of “**bribe**” are nearly always given in English. One is “anything given to people to persuade them to do something they would not ordinarily do.” The other definition is “anything given to people in authority to persuade them to do something wrong.”

People working cross-culturally may pay **transactional bribes** in which they give officials money to do what those officials should do without payment. Those same people may pay **variance bribes** in which they get people to do something illegal.

Extortion is demanding something from people by threatening some negative outcome if the demand is not met. Bribery offers favors or gifts but extortion demands with a threat. Bribery is when I give you money for a certain outcome; extortion is when I threaten something harmful unless you give me money. Many transactional bribes are really extortion.

A **gift** is something which is voluntarily transferred by one person to another without compensation. Note that, unlike bribes, gifts involve no demands or expectations and are given voluntarily.

Like “bribe,” **Shochad**, the Hebrew word most often translated as bribe, also has several meanings. In addition to bribe, it is also often translated as gift or reward. So, like the English word “bribe,” shochad has more than one meaning, meanings similar to those of transactional and variance bribes.

What does the Bible say about bribes?

The Old Testament has much to say about bribes including shochad which is most often translated as “bribe.” However, although several bribery situations occur in it, the New Testament does not use the word “bribe” except in a few versions in one verse in Acts.

The Bible repeatedly commands God’s people not to accept bribes and repeatedly condemns people who do. This condemnation of bribes is clearly stated throughout the Old Testament which always says it is wrong to accept a bribe. In addition, refusing bribes is always right. Unlike accepting bribes, the Bible does not say it is wrong to give a bribe. In fact, it has several passages that encourage giving bribes.

Although the Bible mentions extortion less frequently than it does bribes, both the Old Testament and the New Testament have passages about it. Some versions have more verses about extortion in the Old Testament, and other versions have more in the New Testament.

The Bible always condemns extorting from others, and the Bible always views the extorted person as a victim. Nowhere in Scripture is the victim told not to give in to the extortion nor does it indicate that the person who yields to extortion is guilty of any sin.

Of course, the Bible does not condemn the giving of gifts, as long as the “gifts” are not intended as bribes. People even brought gifts to Jesus himself.

What does the law say about bribes?

In the 1970s, investigations found that hundreds of U.S. corporations admitted making payments totaling millions of dollars to foreign officials, politicians and political parties. In a rare show of unity, the U.S. Congress unanimously passed the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA) in 1977.

This law included both civil and criminal penalties for both corporations and individuals, even when the bribery took place in other countries. Companies paid millions of dollars in fines and individuals served years in prison. By 1998, 33 other countries had passed similar laws and together signed agreements to combat bribery in business transactions.

Although this law prohibits most bribery, it contains an explicit exception to the bribery prohibition for “facilitating payments” for “routine governmental action.” It gives

examples of such things as obtaining permits, licenses or other official documents; processing governmental papers, such as visas; and so forth. Thus, the law agreed on by 33 nations forbids variance bribes, but not transactional bribes. Of course, just because they are legal does not mean that they are good.

Other countries and organizations have urged inclusion of transactional bribes as well. Parliament recently passed the United Kingdom's Bribery Act 2010. This law specifically defines facilitation payments as bribes and violation may result in imprisonment up to 10 years and unlimited fines.

No similar laws exist for extortion. Demanding money from people under threat seems to be illegal in virtually all nations. Extortion is practiced in many nations, but it is officially viewed as a crime.

Reasons people cite to give or not give bribes

Missionaries come to different conclusions about whether or not they should ever give bribes. Here are some arguments in favor of giving bribes under some circumstances.

- Small-scale bribery is an accepted mechanism for legal transactions in many cultures.
- A "bribe" is really just a tip, gift or donation.
- In many cultures, missionaries can accomplish little without providing some financial incentive.
- They may not be able to get a visa to enter the country where God has called them to serve.
- The bribe provides additional income so the underpaid workers can support their families.

Here are some reasons against giving bribes under any circumstances.

- When you pay, you help corrupt the one you bribe.
- Such bribery may have unintended social consequences, keeping a culture unstable.
- Paying shows a lack of faith in God to accomplish His purposes.
- Giving bribes sears the conscience of the giver.
- Your supporters may lose confidence in you if they find out you paid a bribe.
- Bribery may cause dissention on your team if others have different convictions about it.

Other Considerations Deciding whether or not to give a bribe is not simply a matter of lining up arguments for both sides and coming to some conclusion. Here are some other things to consider.

- Intermediaries you hire may pay the bribes for you out of what they charge.
- Humanitarian aid may function as a bribe even if you did not intend it that way.
- Appropriate gift giving varies widely between cultures.

Even if you ask nationals about bribery customs, you may not be proficient enough in the language to ask the right question or to understand the answer. Your nonverbal behavior may not communicate to them, and you may miss what their nonverbal behavior is saying to you.

Even when learning the language from nationals, one may miss parts of the culture for years. Don Richardson illustrates that in *Peace Child* when the Sawi saw Judas as the hero when told the story of Jesus' death.

Finally, remember that Christians reading the same Scriptures often come to different conclusions about a variety of topics. For example, some Christians totally abstain from alcohol, others drink it only at communion, others cook with it and still others drink socially. Likewise, some missionaries do not pay anything that seems to be a bribe while others pay transactional bribes (extortion).

What should one do?—and not do? The best thing one can do is to take preventive measures to avoid being asked for bribes. One can cultivate relationships in culturally accepted ways such as writing thank you notes or giving people appropriate gifts. If asked for a bribe, one can do a variety of things, such as reading the Word on bribery, asking God for wisdom, reading available material and consulting with missionary colleagues and nationals. Of course, there are some things one should not do. For example, do not accept bribes, do not de-Christianize other missionaries who do give appropriate bribes and never give a bribe to cover up something wrong. Here is a series of four questions that may be helpful.

- Stage 1: Is it a bribe, gift or extortion?
- Stage 2: Is this sinful?
- Stage 3: Is this legal?
- Stage 4: Are there other considerations?

Missionaries and Bribes is free at <http://www.missionarycare.com/ebook.htm#bribes>.

This book expands each section of this item in the *Your Call* into a chapter between six

and 10 pages long. In addition, the book has 10 appendices and it may be downloaded free of charge.