

Loving Truth and Peace **A Case Study of Family Resilience in Dealing with Mission/Aid Corruption**

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Do not fear! These are the things which you should do: speak the truth to one another; judge with truth and judgment for peace in your gates. Also let none of you devise evil in your heart against another, and do not love perjury; for I hate all these things, declares the Lord. . . . So love truth and peace. Zechariah 8:15–19 NASB

At the heart of this chapter is the Pace family, four resilient people who refused to ignore an international fraud in the mission/aid community.¹ Names and other identifying details have been changed, and some information is presented in a composite form.² We highlight this serious case to provide support for two types of families: mission families, as they navigate expected challenges of mission/aid life (e.g., transitions, culture stress, relationship tensions, child rearing, existential anxiety, and financial pressures), and the broader mission/aid “family” that comprises senders (agencies/churches) and the international mission/aid community, as it works to develop good governance, accountable management, and verifiable transparency. This case study gives cause for both the Korean and the international mission/aid communities to reflect on the quality of their work and its possible shortcomings, on issues of transparency and accountability, and on the challenges facing mission families.³ It is also a wake-up call to the reality of corruption in our midst and the resilience needed as part of our commitment to “love truth and peace” (Zech. 8:19).

WAKING UP

Corruption causes sleepless nights for millions of people.
Transparency International, 2012

It was unbelievable and utterly disconcerting. Could respected and trusted mission leaders *really* act so uncharacteristically? Could the nefarious face of fraud *really* go undetected by “mature, Spirit-led believers,” hiding for years behind a mask of benevolence in the Christian mission/aid community? Would good people *really* deal with corruption (defined by Transparency International as the abuse of entrusted power for personal gain) by rationalizing their responsibility to help, protecting themselves and their livelihoods, and tolerating the discrediting and dismissal of their fellow colleagues who confronted it? Could resilient evil (complicity, cover-ups, and cowardice) *really* win the day over resilient virtue (perseverance, honesty, and courage)? The answer, sadly, is a resounding “yes.”

Alejandro (Alex) Pace, a middle-aged man living in Asia, a respected international leader known for his tireless efforts to create mission/aid networks on behalf of the poor, was ejected from the organization to which he had belonged for fifteen years. A trio of organizational leaders informed him that he had a mental disorder and was responsible for a long history of broken relationships, that he had willfully disregarded the instructions of his organizational leaders, and that he was in need of psychiatric care and spiritual direction.

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Pace was dismissed—and by default his wife, also—his services were neither endorsed nor recommended, and no appeal against his dismissal was permitted. Almost all communication was by e-mail. With no warning, donor funds for the Pace family ceased to be passed on to them.

Previous to his dismissal, Alex Pace and Chandra, his wife of seventeen years, had asked to meet with senior leaders of the organization to discuss the impact on the organization of a long-running international multi-million-dollar fraud in the church and mission communities that had just become public. The fraud was essentially a Ponzi scheme, with payments made to earlier investors coming from subsequent investors' capital, rather than from earnings from the capital investment itself. The scheme, available only privately, had been sold to people in Christian ministry with guarantees that their capital would be protected, that they would receive a 10 percent annual return on their investment, and that an additional donation would be made by the fund to a charity. The scheme had been presented in a low-key manner as a special opportunity for mission workers and for the Kingdom of God.

Their request for a meeting denied, the Paces had continued, along with others, to request organizational disclosure and independent review. Well-informed and committed to the organization's health, the Paces were typecast as disloyal problem makers. Was their real transgression that they knew too much about the fraud (firsthand as investor-victims), were too influential, and could create instability in the organization by calling for transparency and accountability?

This type of response to whistleblowers (i.e., retaliation) is very common, as observed by Warren Bennis et al. in their book *Transparency: How Leaders Create a Culture of Candor*.

Although whistleblowers are often exiled from their organizations for their unwanted candor . . . they almost always found the courage to speak out in their deep commitment to the core values of the organization. Even when labeled traitors by their colleagues, such tellers of unsettling truths often feel passionate loyalty to the organization and act because they feel the secret activity violates its mission and ethical core. . . . If dissidents aren't called crazy, they are portrayed as disloyal. . . . The charge of disloyalty is as easy for leaders to bring against followers as it is difficult for the accused to counter and disprove. Moreover, as loyalty is typically an admirable trait, it is also a convenient blind for cowardly followers to hide behind.⁴

RISING UP

*You were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light.
And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them.*
Ephesians 5: 8, 11 NASB

The accusations justifying the Paces' dismissal sounded convincing, and the mission's leaders claimed they had also received letters of complaint about Alex that had to be kept anonymous for reasons of confidentiality. These charges rapidly unraveled, however, and in their place ongoing criminal investigations came to light, accompanied by circumvention of organizational guidelines for handling complaints, lack of due process, and ultimatums when there had been no violation of organizational rules or moral failure. The Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability has noted, "Recent scandals in the for-profit and nonprofit worlds have highlighted the importance of integrity within an organization. . . . It is therefore important that nonprofit organizations establish a means for employees to report concerns

about misconduct, dishonesty, or fraud. Such a reporting structure should be recorded and communicated to employees in a written policy on suspected misconduct, dishonesty, and fraud.”⁵ Where were the policies and guidelines that would have enabled the organization to help itself by focusing on the real issues rather than on trumped-up charges against members of its staff?

Despite deep organizational and mission/aid loyalties, the Paces’ friends, family, sending churches, and long-term donors, as well as several close colleagues in the organization, were not misled by the accusations and held their ground. They not only had known Alex and Chandra personally for many years but also were concerned that their dismissal had taken place in the context of an international fraud that had had a serious impact on many organizations. Yet the organization remained silent on the fraud’s impact, either positive or negative, on their projects and personnel, thereby missing the opportunity to conduct the necessary intensive postmortem. But as Bennis et al. observe:

Any time an organization makes a seriously wrong decision, its leaders should call for an intensive postmortem. Such learning opportunities are too often overlooked. The tendency is simply to call on the public relations department to spin the matter, to make another inadequately thought-out decision, and perhaps to scapegoat, even fire, a few staff members. Because most companies cover up their mistakes instead of learning from them, systemic flaws in information flow tend to remain to do their damage another day. . . . Transparency is one evidence of an organization’s moral health.⁶

DEVELOPING RESILIENCE

*Human resiliency is the ability to face reality:
to engage with and grow through life’s challenges and adversities
via inner strength, social support, and transcendent values.*

Despite the ongoing support they received, Chandra, Alex, and their two adolescent sons, Nate and George, were entering a very dark period. Confronting corruption takes time and skill. It also compounds the normal adjustment challenges that couples and families face, and it can take a toll on the mental health of those involved.⁷ In spite of what they knew to be true, the Paces began to wonder if some of the accusations and half-truths were accurate, being partially related to their attempts with others to help resolve relational discord in another setting. Additionally, they were experiencing the lingering, pervasive hold that dysfunctional organizational systems can have on their members (e.g., group conformity and “group think”), a hold that can undermine members’ critical evaluation and spiritual discernment: the sense of family and desire to stay part of one’s family (unity/belonging at all costs), the desire to trust leaders and believe the best of them (pleasing surrogate parents), and a fear of how one might make a living outside of the organization (dependence on the organizational system/“family”). Again, in the words of Bennis et al.:

Pride in belonging to a high-performing or a high-status group and the cozy sense of belonging to a tight-knit organizational “family” can be genuine sources of professional satisfaction. The paradox is that there is a dark side to belonging—the almost reflexive temptation to spin information in ways that protect the group’s shared pride, to make the group look better than it really is, or even simply to preserve the group. All these make it easier for group members to suppress information or distort it.⁸

As they helped to spearhead a call for transparency and accountability, Alex and Chandra found themselves embroiled in a trying five-year period marked intermittently by despair, disillusionment, and a sense of betrayal. The protracted experience led to self-doubts and deep soul-searching. Were they committed to “serving Jesus with integrity,” regardless of the cost?⁹ There were many sleepless nights punctuated with pervasive entreaties of “How long, O Lord?” Chest pains suffered by Chandra appeared to be caused by stress. A substantial amount of their professional and personal time was given to supporting a government investigation, distracting them from their usual work of networking/advocacy on behalf of the poor. Discouragement lurked as a fifth, unwanted member of the family. How might their experiences affect the boys’ understanding of God’s goodness and justice? Did their family have the resilience to continue to pursue justice? Twice their car was tampered with in such a way that there could have been a fatal accident. Many times they were excluded or uninvited from interagency and regional mission gatherings. Three other groups of which they were part followed the lead of their former mission organization and also dismissed them. Colleagues who had appeared to be friends now kept their distance.

The Paces endeavored to maintain a balanced perspective by getting regular input from those to whom they were accountable (their sending churches) and by recognizing the spiritual dimensions of the situation. They sought to maintain, in their words, a “tender heart” and a “strong mind” in the face of bullying and while they were seeking to confront organizational misconduct. They were also keen to avoid bitterness, to maintain their bodily health through exercise and sound nutrition, and to experience beauty daily with gratitude. Scripture provided strength to persevere and offered mirrors for self-awareness. The Paces were also inspired by secular and Christian writings and by models of faith and courage provided by historical heroes. They were sustained in the long haul by their faith in God; their commitment to love truth, peace, and people; and their understanding of human behavior, as well as by close lifelong friends and supportive exhortations from their two sending churches—“Stay the course” and “Help to bring the fraud into the light.”

Only in retrospect is it evident that the Pace family became more resilient through their experiences of adversity. In *Strengthening Family Resilience*, Froma Walsh identifies several protective family processes that foster resilience: (1) family belief systems that make meaning of adversity, are positive in outlook, and are characterized by transcendent values and spirituality; (2) family organizational patterns that are marked by flexibility and stability, connectedness, and social/economic resources; and (3) family communication processes that are grounded in clarity, open emotional expression, and collaborative problem solving.¹⁰ These processes were key to the Pace family’s well-being. Existing family strengths were reinforced, and their compassion for others and sensitivity to issues of social justice were heightened. Characteristics often associated with people who flourish can be identified in the Paces, such as the presence of positive emotion displayed in happiness and life satisfaction, as well as in their living lives of engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement.¹¹ These years were a growing season for the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23) and the fruit of the light (Eph. 5:9) in all their lives. The boys felt their parents modeled a healthy spirituality, demonstrating that one could struggle honestly with one’s faith in the midst of adversity. Nate mentioned being proud of his parents’ moral courage and competence. George gave a gift to his parents with Chinese characters that expressed “Heaven is reserved for those who are truthful.” Both boys also specifically described a sense of stability in their home life and the family’s shared sense of hope in spite of hardship.

WISING UP

The only thing necessary for corruption to flourish is to do nothing about it—or to do some non-efficacious and non-resolute “thing” and then move on, often with our consciences placated and our livelihoods protected.

The Paces’ case is not uncommon. In the United States, for instance, an estimated 30 million people annually are victims of fraud, with a loss of up to \$50 billion.¹² No one can escape exposure to fraud’s far-reaching toxins, including people and organizations in the faith-based community. Prudently confronting corruption and the unspeakable evils within one’s spheres of influence is truly a form of being salt and light in this world (Matt. 5:13–16);¹³ in these matters, ordinary folks can act heroically.¹⁴

Todd Johnson and Peter Crossing have estimated that, within the global church, US\$37 billion is stolen annually through “ecclesiastical crime,” a figure that exceeds their estimate of US\$33 billion in income for global foreign mission.¹⁵ Bahn Lee has observed that “a string of recent embezzlement cases involving mission organizations in Korea clearly indicates the need for stronger financial accountability within our cultural matrix,” noting that “any real progress will require an initial building of awareness, education, and assistance in implementing financial systems among multiple publics: board, leaders, staff, and donors.”¹⁶

To combat corruption it is imperative that the mission community keep abreast of the experiences and resources of other sectors. Humanitarian assistance programs have faced similar struggles. The July 2008 report from Transparency International et al. on the extent of corruption in humanitarian assistance makes sobering reading. One of its main conclusions is equally applicable to mission/aid workers: “Many humanitarian workers have a narrow view of what constitutes corruption, seeing it primarily as a financial issue, rather than abuse of power. . . . Corruption extends beyond fraudulent financial practices to ‘non-financial corruption’ such as nepotism/cronyism, sexual exploitation and abuse, coercion and intimidation of humanitarian staff or aid recipients for personal, social or political gain, manipulation of assessments, targeting and registration to favor particular groups, and diversion of assistance to non-target groups.”¹⁷

Fortunately, recent scandals can sensitize us to the grim realities of widespread financial deception, exploitation, and abuse of power. Let us do all we can to take greater precautions as we learn about the alluring schemes of criminals—and at times colleagues—and to develop ways for dealing realistically with the many facets of corruption in our midst. Let us also have a greater appreciation of our own vulnerability to temptation, including our propensities to distort, excuse, and justify our mistakes and misdeeds.¹⁸ Many resources are available to support these efforts.¹⁹

TRUSTING GOD

And the simple step of a simple courageous man is not to partake in falsehood, not to support false actions! Let [the lie] enter the world, let it even reign in the world—but not with my help. Aleksandr Solzhenitzyn, 1970 Nobel Prize Address

The multi-million-dollar international fraud in this case study has affected many organizations, people, and projects. An initial professional review carried out by a business consultant explored its impact on the church-mission community, including dismissals, responses, and lessons learned. A network was formed for mutual support and to share

information with the public. Governments began to investigate. Alex and others testified at a court case that revealed gross long-standing fraud. In the meantime, there have been media reports in several countries and calls for assistance from victims and from members and donors of affected organizations. Public court records shed light on forms of involvement and the flow of money. Yet there has been limited help or action by the church and mission communities, an unsettling fact that calls into question their reputation.

We close this case study with guiding words from Jewish Wisdom literature that encourage not just mission/aid families but all of us as we respond resiliently in the midst of adversity. May we love truth and peace—and people—as tangible expressions of our commitment to good governance/management practices within the mission/aid community. May we be and bring an authentic message of good news to our fellow humans.

My child, if you aspire to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for an ordeal. Be sincere of heart, be steadfast, and do not be alarmed when disaster comes. Cling to him and do not leave him, so that you may be honoured at the end of your days. Whatever happens to you, accept it, and in the uncertainties of your humble state, be patient, since gold is tested in the fire, and the chosen in the furnace of humiliation. Trust him and he will uphold you, follow a straight path and hope in him. (Sirach 2:1–7 NJB)²⁰

Reflection and Discussion

1. Identify some of the main challenges in this case that could affect a family's well-being and development of resilience.
2. Give an example of how an important "furnace of adversity and affliction" has further developed the character and resilience of you or your family.
3. Describe any experiences with corruption that you have had or witnessed within mission/aid organizations or settings. What have been some helpful/unhelpful responses?
4. Comment on some culturally relevant ways to build resilience in mission/aid families as they deal with adversity, including corruption. What safeguards, training, or resources are needed?
5. List a few applications for your life and work based on any of the five subtitles in this article: Waking Up, Rising Up, Developing Resilience, Wising Up, and Trusting God.

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Endnotes

1. This chapter ©2013, Kelly and Michèle O’Donnell. Used by permission. The O’Donnells may be contacted via MCResources@gmail.com.
2. Besides the case presented here, the authors have researched various cases of fraud and interviewed people who have been affected. The construction of this case study has been informed by our wider research.
3. For further help in such reflection, see Steve Moon, “Missions from Korea 2012: Slowdown and Maturation,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 36, no. 2 (April 2012): 84–85. See particularly the seven “deeper questions” he poses.
4. Warren Bennis, Daniel Coleman, James O’Toole, and Patricia Ward Biederman, *Transparency: How Leaders Create a Culture of Candor* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 10, 79.
5. Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, “Policy on Suspected Misconduct, Dishonesty, Fraud, and Whistle-Blower Protection,” in Kelly O’Donnell, *Global Member Care: The Pearls and Perils of Good Practice* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2011), 122.

6. Bennis, Coleman, O'Toole, and Biederman, *Transparency*, 22-23, 42.
7. For discussion of these issues, see Leslie Andrews, ed., *The Family in Mission: Understanding and Caring for Those Who Serve* (Palmer Lake, Colo.: Mission Training International, 2004); Joyce Bowers, ed., *Raising Resilient MKs: Resources for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Association of Christian Schools International, 1998); and Kelly O'Donnell, "Developmental Tasks in the Life Cycle of Mission Families," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 15 (1987): 281–90."
8. Bennis, Coleman, O'Toole, and Biederman, *Transparency*, 35–36.
9. Dwight P. Baker and Douglas Hayward, eds., *Serving Jesus with Integrity: Ethics and Accountability in Mission* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2010).
10. Froma Walsh, *Strengthening Family Resilience*, 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2006); see especially p. 26.
11. On such characteristics, see Martin Seligman, *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being* (New York: Free Press, 2011), 24.
12. Anna Miller, "Outsmarting Con Artists," *Monitor on Psychology* 44, no. 2 (2013): 30–33.
13. Os Guinness, *Unspeakable: Facing Up to Evil in an Age of Genocide and Terror* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2005); Paul Batchelor and Steve Osei-Mensah, "Salt and Light: Christians' Role in Combating Corruption," October 31, 2011, <http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/conversations/detail/12129>
14. Recall the stalwart and courageous affirmation of Aleksandr Solzhenitzyn in his 1970 Nobel Prize address, "And the simple step of a simple courageous man is not to partake in falsehood, not to support false actions! Let [the lie] enter the world, let it even reign in the world—but not with my help," www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1970/solzhenitsyn-lecture.html. On the opposite propensity in human affairs, see Philip Zimbardo, "The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil," www.lucifereffect.com.
15. Todd M. Johnson and Peter F. Crossing, "Christianity 2013: Renewalists and Faith and Migration," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 37, no. 1 (January 2013): 32–33.
16. Bahn Seok (Peter) Lee, "Accountability Issues among Korean Missions Organizations," in *Accountability in Missions: Korean and Western Case Studies*, ed. Jonathan J. Bonk (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 181, 200.
17. Feinstein International Center, Humanitarian Policy Group, and Transparency International, *Preventing Corruption in Humanitarian Assistance: Final Research Report*, 2008, www.odi.org.uk/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/1836.pdf, 2–3.
18. See Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson, *Mistakes Were Made (But Not by Me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions, and Hurtful Acts* (Orlando, Fla.: Harcourt, 2007).
19. See, for example, the American Association of Retired Persons, "Weapons of Fraud," 2012, www.youtube.com/watch?v=AVuqzihLQ10; Serious Fraud Office, United Kingdom, "What Is Fraud?" www.sfo.gov.uk/fraud/what-is-fraud.aspx; O'Donnell, *Global Member Care*, part 2, and Bonk, ed. *Accountability in Missions*.
20. The New Jerusalem Bible translation of Sirach, chap. 2, is available at www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?bible_chapter=2&id=28.